

HUBERT THE HAPPY

A STORY
OF XIIITH CENTURY FRANCE
By Ella Shannon Bowles



Hubert the Happy

By ELLA SHANNON BOWLES

Author of "Children of the Border."

Often had Hubert dreamed of hunting with a falcon on his wrist as the knights did, but he, son of Jean the peasant, could never even own a falcon. Then one day the little Lady Jonquile lost her falcon and asked Hubert to find it for her. And find it he did.

But many things happened from the time when Hubert saw the falcon in the hands of old Mele, before it was returned to the Lady Jonquile. There was Sned, the One-Eyed; a night spent in a tree with a wild boar at the foot; and Mele with her strange mutterings about a gold chain. And then at the great tournament, the mystery was solved. 4 *Illustrations* by Lyle Justis.

David Dell

Christmas 1934

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HUBERT THE HAPPY





"Mercy! Mercy, Little Lady!" She Whined

HUBERT THE HAPPY

A Story of France in the XIIITH Century

By

Ella Shannon Bowles

Author of "Children of the Border"

Illustrated by

Lyle Justis



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To Mariette

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HUBERT THE HAPPY





CHAPTER I

Beside the Thorn Bush

A CRICKET chirped shrilly. In a nearby thicket chattered a blackbird. High in the blue sky above the thriftily cultivated fields sounded a piercing shriek unlike the peaceful, happy sounds of the summer's day.

A boy, lying on his side in the shade of the thick copse, turned over on his back and stared upward. Then he placed a restraining hand on the bundle of rags which was squirming beside him.

"Sh! 'Tis the falcon hunt,* Rat! Be quiet.

** Falconry, or hunting with falcons and hawks, was one of the chief sports of French nobles of the thirteenth century.*

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The gentry ride again. Mayhap we shall see the fun, if we be careful!"

The bundle wriggled, righted itself, and developed into the outlines of a thin, sharp-faced boy.

"Indeed they ride—and often!" His voice rose in a shrill squeak. "Look yonder at the wheat our father raised, Hubert! Look! Laid low by their horses ——"

"Hush, hush, Rat!" Hubert interrupted. "'Tis the baron's right to hunt across the crops if he so wishes. But see!—See! there is the falcon! Right up there! What a noble creature! Watch how he strikes the bird!"

He scrambled to his feet and shading his eyes with his hand watched the contest between the falcon and its prey.

The boy, outlined against the sombre shadows of the baron's forest, made a pleasing picture. The tattered and filthy rags fluttering from him could not conceal the lines

BESIDE THE THORN BUSH

of his graceful body. The long, unkempt, black hair hanging about his broad forehead only softened the glow of his flashing eyes. The smiling lips revealed strong, white teeth. And there, tucked away in the grime smearing his square chin, was a dimple that a mother would have loved to touch with the tip of her little finger.

Yet, in all the twelve years of his life, no woman's fingers had ever touched the dimple, for Hubert's mother had no time nor any inclination to fondle her eleven children.

The Rat, too, stood erect, and, had you been a stranger in this barony of northern France in the thirteenth century, you might have wondered how it was possible that these two boys—the one so handsome, so strong, and so merry—the other so undersized and wizened, with squinting eyes staring crookedly from either side of his long nose—could be brothers! Yet any man, woman or child would have as-

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sured you that in the large household of Jean, the farmer, and Yvonne, his wife, there were but two sons.

Suddenly Hubert raised his hand. "Look, look, look! Art thou noticing, Rat, that the falcon is bringing down his prey? Sometimes I dream—that I am hunting—that a swift horse is beneath me—the blue sky above and a noble hawk, bonnily hooded, rides on my wrist——"

"Cease thy dreaming," the Rat hissed. "Yonder comes our father! See, he is rubbing the mist of his midday nap from his eyes. He will be short of temper. Let us get to work. Be quick!"

He picked up the heavy mattock that he had thrown aside before his noon rest and began prodding at the turf he was breaking for the next season's sowing. When Jean lumbered up to the boys, the Rat was busily working.

BESIDE THE THORN BUSH

But Hubert had not turned. His eyes still followed the downward course of the falcon.

"'Tis indeed passing strange!" he muttered. "There is no sound of voices or galloping of horses or winding of horns! Where are the huntsmen?"

"To thy work, lad!" Jean's voice rumbled from the matted beard hanging over his tunic. "Thou art weeding—or at least should be! What with the deer, his lordship's huntsmen and lazy-bones of overgrown boys where will the crops be, I ask! Another famine the coming winter, I trow! Then wilt thou cry for food to warm thy insides!"

He struck at the Rat with his foot, but the boy did not look up from his work. He was quite used to kicks and cuffs and beatings. Jean did not raise his hand against Hubert. He had not struck him since the day a year ago when the dark-eyed lad had faced the peasant with haughtily raised head. Jean

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could never understand why he had failed to smite the boy's cheek.

"Here, Hubert," the farmer growled, "get thee home and bring the oxen ——"

For Jean, somewhat better off than his neighbors, owned a pair of oxen and a plough. His hovel, too, though built on a dung-heap, was a little larger than the other huts. He owned a bed and his wife had a crude bake-oven in which she could bake her loaves of dark bread instead of taking them to the castle cook-house.

The falcon had now dropped from sight. With a last longing look at the blue sky, Hubert turned and trotted across the fields skirting the fields that the peasants of the barony of St. Vincent's hired at heavy rates from their liege lord, the Baron Wilfred.

Ah, it was good to be alive when the sun shone in the sky, when the birds trilled in the thickets, and when the smell of ripened wheat

BESIDE THE THORN BUSH

hung heavy in the air! What matter if one's stomach was a little empty, or if one's clothes hung in tatters!

The boy's voice rose in a new song which he had heard Jacques, the jongleur,* singing at the last tourney.**

“The rose also with the blush of morn,
That cometh from a bush of thorn,
Now asks of me that I shall sing
For her own love one charming thing.”

The last rich note rose clear and strong. Hubert paused, and, raising himself on tiptoe, held above his head an imaginary, flower-bedecked lute.

He was so much interested in his game that he had not heard the soft padding of horses' feet coming from the forest. He jumped as a voice called to him.

“Hist, yokel, cease thy singing! Come hither!”

** The jongleurs were professional entertainers, skilled in song and in the recitation of ballads and romances.*

*** Tourneys were festivals arranged for the meets between knights.*

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A tall lad of perhaps fifteen years was seated high on a prancing horse holding it in leash with a gauntleted right hand. Hubert did not need to glance at the red and black striped stockings, covering the shapely legs, nor the loose crimson tunic and bonnet in the colors used by the retainers of the castle, to recognize him as the first squire who was being trained by the Baron Wilfred.

Everyone in the barony knew Sire Claire, nephew of the Duke of Vertebois. That he had been placed in the baron's charge for his education in knightly lore was a mark of the confidence held by the powerful duke for his neighbor and vassal, the wise Wilfred. For handsome Claire was the apple of his uncle's eye, and, 'twas whispered, his heir, since the duke's only son, Sire Victor, a boy of twelve, was an invalid who could never lead men into battle.

Like all the other serfs, Hubert was look-

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ing forward to the day when Sire Claire should be dubbed a knight. The knighting of such an important personage would bring lords and ladies for miles around, perhaps from Paris, to see him win his vestures. There would be feasting and largesse for all. Might the day soon come!

Hubert pulled a front lock of his hair. Never before had Sire Claire deigned to address him.

"Thy will, Sire?" he asked.

"The lady's will, Yokel," the young lord replied, as he doffed his bonnet and bowed.

There on a cream-white horse sat a twelve-year-old girl whose exquisite loveliness was enhanced by the background of the huge thorn-bush growing near the edge of the forest.

Hubert smiled as he looked up at her. In the manner of all ladies of the hunt, she was seated astride. A long crimson garment picked

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out with gold fell in graceful folds about her so that she seemed carven in one with the wise-eyed horse. From her shoulders hung a rich, blue mantle lined with the crimson of her garment and trimmed with the fur of the gray squirrel. Embroidered chamois gloves covered her slender hands and her head was protected from the rays of the midsummer's sun by a shimmering golden veil, exactly matching the ribbon-twined braids of shining hair falling to her knees. Altogether, the Lady Jonquile, only daughter of Baron Wilfred, was a young dame of elegance.

Later, at her birthday feast, Hubert would hear the jongleur break forth into a song concerning the beauty of her face, the gracefulness of her swan-like neck, and the softness of her blue eyes like downy birds hiding in the rushes.

The peasant boy placed his right hand on his heart and bowed low before her. The

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young squire lifted his dark eye-brows. Such an act of courtesy he never before had seen in a yokel.

The Lady Jonquile was speaking and Hubert stood with bowed head, as was seemly.

"Listen carefully, good Yokel. I am in sore trouble and of a great sadness. I have lost my proud new falcon sent me as a token by his grace, the Duke of Vertebois!"

"And what dost thou wish?" Hubert interrupted in his great anxiety to be of assistance to her.

"I pray thee, do not question me," the young girl rebuked him. "Sire Claire and I brought the bonny bird to the forest to try him before the great hunt which my father hath arranged for the duke. Alas! We cannot now find my treasure—and—and never before had I anything so wonderful!"

Tears stood in her eyes and threatened to roll down her cheeks.

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"And may I remind the Lady Jonquile that her noble mother ——" began Sire Claire.

"Will be sore vexed with her if she be not there to greet the Lord of Vertebois," the girl finished. Then again she looked down at Hubert. "Oh, Yokel, leave thy work and search for my bird. Never before did girl of my age, I do truly believe, own a falcon! Why, Sire Claire hath just changed from sparrow-hawk to falcon!" She was speaking now, not as high-born lady to a peasant, but as a girl to a boy who knew her pleasures and interests.

"Again may I remind thee, Lady ——" Squire Claire once more interrupted.

"Yes! Yes!" Lady Jonquile spoke to her horse, then reined him in again while Sire Claire brought his palfrey to his haunches in his efforts not to leap ahead of her.

She leaned far down from her saddle.

"Oh, Yokel, please find my dear falcon for me—and dost thou find him—bring him to the

BESIDE THE THORN BUSH

castle. And—and—for a token——” she paused, and from her right hand pulled her gauntlet picked out with gold threads. “Dost thou find my own sweet bird, this glove will admit thee to the castle and to me.”

She threw down the glove and it fell at Hubert's feet. So, striking her horse's neck with her bare hand, she galloped away.

CHAPTER II

Sire Falcon

HUBERT stared at the glove. Then he stooped down and picked it up. Never had he held in his hand anything so lovely. A little smile darted around his lips. He puckered up his mouth, and, staring ruefully at his dirt-begrimed hands, dropped the dainty object.

Where could he keep such a thing of beauty! He could not even touch it. But a sudden thought chased the frown from his face. Turning, he plucked a half-dozen large leaves from a nearby oak tree. With his finger-

SIRE FALCON

nails, he carefully pried off a number of the sharp, red thorns on the bush. It took but a minute to wrap the gauntlet in the sweet, green leaves and fasten them together to form a strong envelope. He smiled as he surveyed his handiwork. It pleased him. He placed the packet far down in the neck of his soiled tunic.

“And now for thee, Sire Falcon!” he cried.

Hubert knew that this time he would be unable to escape a beating for not going after Jean’s oxen.

But who could refuse the Lady Jonquile’s request? Besides there was the valuable falcon. Should he find the straying bird, Jean might overlook his misdemeanor. For the falcon was an important institution in the feudal life of the year of grace of 1250. Falconry was a sport in which lords and ladies, squires and demoiselles, and even children indulged. As meet that knight be without his sword as without his hawk! Wealthy nobles owned falcon-

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ries where birds trained to hunt hares, herons, and small birds were cared for by special attendants. The hawks learned to obey whistles and calls and were taught to return to the wrists of their masters when the hunt was over. Special attention was paid to their diet and their health was carefully guarded. No better present than a trained bird could be given to a lady or a nobleman. Hawking was a popular way of giving entertainment to a guest of an afternoon. Horns blew; horses pranced; voices rose gaily. If a heron was sighted, off came the hoods from the hawks and the hunt was on. But woe, indeed, to the serf who should find a falcon and not return it at once to its master!

Trying to recall the exact spot where he had seen the falcon swooping for its prey, Hubert looked up at the sky. Ah, yes, he had it now! The bird had soared directly over those clustered oaks in the heart of the forest.

SIRE FALCON

Strange it had not returned to its mistress. No doubt it was too young to have completed its training.

He would start on the quest and hunt until he found the noble bird. He slipped behind the thorn bush and began to patter along among the shadows of the trees.

If Hubert had stopped to consider he might have had qualms of fear for the woods were full of wild animals fully protected by law for the baron's hunting. The peasants were not allowed to kill the deer which boldly ate their crops, and hours of Hubert's life were spent in driving the creatures away from the tender, sprouting grain.

Keeping the direction of the falcon in mind, he hurried on, for he wished to be well rid of the forest before the long summer's day came to a close.

Nearing the spot where he felt sure the bird had alighted, he walked more quietly. His

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eyes searched each thicket and peered up into the trees.

"It will be a hard and hopeless hunt for Sire Falcon, I trow," the boy said aloud.

Then he wished that he had not spoken, for from a thick entanglement of overhanging branches and growth of thorn bushes sounded a wild shriek.

Hubert's heart began to beat wildly. A picture of the huge and frightful wild boar seen by some of the peasants and which the baron was planning to hunt ere long flashed into his mind. Better to run away than to confront such a demon here in the wilds of the forest!

But the falcon? The boy paused. Lady Jonquile would be sorely disappointed should her pet be lost. Moreover, he would like to capture it just for the sheer joy and excitement of the chase. This was the nearest thing approaching a hunt which had ever come his way.

SIRE FALCON

Pooh! Foolish fears were getting the best of him! The frightful screech might not be the death-cry of the wild boar's victim, but only the wailing of a hare caught by a crafty fox. He would not run away until he had learned the secret.

So, step by step, he carefully picked his way toward the wall of the thick greenery. Sinking down on his hands and knees, he peered through the bushes.

He looked straight down into a secluded glen, walled on the side where he was crouching by the forest and on the others by jagged cliffs surmounted by trees. Over one crag tinkled a shining waterfall dropping into a pool darkened by ferns and rushes.

Hubert did not dwell upon the beauty of the glen, for an engrossing scene was taking place in front of him.

In the center of the dell stood a tall girl clothed in garments even more ragged than

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those of the boy who was watching her. Her long black hair hung to her waist and shaded her sullen eyes. She was holding her right arm with her left hand and from beneath her fingers trickled drops of blood.

"And thou shalt not take the bird to the castle, my girl," a shrill voice cried.

In front of the girl stood a shriveled, bent figure swathed in a smeared, dark cape. A hood partly concealed the wrinkled face, the wisps of gray hair, and the twinkling eyes.

To Hubert she was something far more dangerous than a maddened boar. He had often caught sight of her at dusk as she hovered on the outskirts of the settlement. The peasants knew her as Mele, the Witch. They did not realize that she was but a poor, old, unfortunate woman who had no means of gaining a living. So, in an age which firmly believed in witches and supernatural beings, she was both feared and hated.

SIRE FALCON

Only two weeks since the baron's bailiff had ordered her from the vicinity and Hubert never expected to see her again.

"The falcon is mine. I found it!" the girl answered as she still nursed her wounded arm.

"Falcon thine, my Gerte? And we are starving! All that is thine is mine, is it not? So shall we sell the bird and get precious money. If you take it to the castle, a few crusts will be thy only recompense."

"No! No! It is the law of death if one be caught with a hunting-hawk!" Gerte cried.

"But we shall not be caught! I shall sell the bird to Sned, the trader. They give us nothing—these nobles—and we can live or die as best we may!"

Hubert had recovered somewhat from his consternation at finding Mele in the forest. Suddenly it dawned upon him that they were talking of Lady Jonquile's lost falcon. He nearly cried aloud in his delight, for at that

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very minute Mele stepped back and there was the bird! It was fastened by a strip of cloth to a small sapling, but the splendor of the royal hawk was dimmed by the strip of soiled linen placed over his eyes for a hood.

"Ah, ha, Sire Falcon!" the boy muttered. "'Tis time thou wert rescued from such indignity!"

It would never do to follow his impulse to leap through the thicket. A witch was a witch. He must wait and see what happened next.

Mele was now speaking. Though her voice had grown less shrill Hubert could distinctly hear what she was saying.

"Indeed, I knew not that the stick had a thorn, Gerte. I meant not to draw blood from thy arm. 'Tis obedience I desire, but I do not wish to harm thee!"

As he listened to her pleading, Hubert realized that, after all, the witch was only a harmless old woman.

SIRE FALCON

"Now, see that thou watchest the hawk well, while I go to seek Sned," she continued. "I cannot have thee starve, girl. It may be full dark when I return with him, but look to it that nothing happens to the prize."

"Oh, Mele, do not leave me," the girl begged, all her sullenness gone. "I am afraid alone here in the forest!"

"There is no other way, Gerte. Here—take the bird and clamber up there in the cave in the rocks. Nothing can harm thee there." The old woman turned and disappeared into the shadows of the forest.

Hubert waited until he felt sure that Mele was safely out of the way. Meanwhile Gerte bandaged her arm with some ferns. She then stepped toward the falcon.

This was the boy's signal to scramble through the thicket. When he stood in front of the frightened girl, she gave a smothered

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cry and stared at the apparition which had seemingly appeared out of space.

Gerte was not reassured when she made up her mind that this was a real boy instead of a forest creature. The village boys always stoned her as she skulked at Mele's heels as they ventured to the hamlet where lived the peasants of the barony. And here she was alone in the forest at the mercy of one of her tormentors!

How he stared at her! She would run now while she could! But, no, there was the falcon she had found wedged between two stones near the pool. She could be punished by death for having the hawk in her possession! What would this boy do when he saw it? She dared not run away! She dared not stay! She shivered and over her shoulder gazed at Hubert.

"See, thou girl!" the boy cried. "Let me have the falcon. I wish to take it——"

Gerte's eyes flashed. She wheeled about and



The Road Home

SIRE FALCON

faced him. She recalled Mele's commands. Moreover, the bird was hers by right of finding.

"No! No!" she cried, "I found it! But I intend to return it to its owner," she quickly added.

"I know who owns it," Hubert replied. He reached over and clutched the bird.

Gerte's natural courage had now returned and she flung herself full against him. She was a large, muscular girl and her assault was unexpected. The boy tripped over a protruding root, fell, and sprawled full length upon the ground.

In an instant Gerte was upon him, pummeling him with her fists, striking anywhere that she could land a blow. After a hard tussle he managed to turn himself over and with one arm grasped her about the waist. With all the pent-up fury that she had against the boys who had tormented her, Gerte threw herself

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against him. Over and over the pair rolled until Hubert, clasping her wrists with strong fingers, and gripping her shoulders with his other hand, shook her well. They sat up facing each other and glaring like two wild creatures of the forest.

CHAPTER III

Across Ploughed Acres

TO GERTE'S great surprise, the corners of Hubert's mouth twitched; tiny crinkles formed about his merry eyes; he burst into loud peals of laughter. He seemed harmless enough, to be sure! But the girl still frowned. He might be playing her a trick.

"Are we not funny?" he cried gaily. "Here we are glaring at each other when we might be friends. I am Hubert, son of Jean, the farmer, should my name be of interest to thee, girl."

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"It is no concern of mine what thy name may be," muttered Gerte.

"No?" Hubert smiled. "Shall I tell thee by what name thou art called then, since thou wilt not tell me? Is it Gerte, fair demoiselle?"

Gerte pouted. "Mayhap it is. What then? And wilt thou loosen my hands?"

"Promise, then, not to fight and to let me have the falcon."

"But I will fight—and I'll not let thee have the falcon. He is mine by right of finding! That is ——"

"No, he is not thine nor mine, Gerte. He belongs at the castle ——"

"And there I should take him, had I my way!"

"Hadst thou thy way! But Mele hath other plans. I heard them Gerte!"

The girl attempted to free her hands. "Do not tell," she begged, "Do not tell, Hubert, son of Jean, else Mele and I ——"

ACROSS PLOUGHED ACRES

"Will leave this earth!" Hubert interrupted.

Gerte cringed and began to whimper. "I told Mele—I desired to take the falcon back ——"

"Let me have him," the boy begged.

Gerte looked fearfully over her shoulder. "If I could trust thee," she whispered.

"And that thou mayst," Hubert assured her. "Moreover, I have the token of the Lady Jonquile who owns the falcon!"

"Were I certain?"

"Listen, Gerte, let us cease our quarreling. See! I unloose thy wrists because I trust thee. Wait, let me show thee!"

The boy scrambled to his knees, and, putting his hand down the neck of his tunic, pulled forth the package wrapped in oak leaves. He drew out the thorns and held out Lady Jonquile's glove.

Gerte's breath came through her lips in an

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excited whistle. She touched the dainty thing with her roughened forefinger.

"So beautiful! What is it?" she murmured.

"The glove of Lady Jonquile, the daughter of our baron. She lost the falcon, a present from the great duke. She begged me to seek for it. This glove is a token to let me inside the castle hall."

He carefully wrapped up the gauntlet and, returning it to its hiding-place, stood up.

"Come, now, Gerte, shall I not take the bird with thy good consent?" he asked.

"Yes! Yes!" she answered wildly. "I ever desired to take it to the castle! What Mele will say, I know not!"

"Is the witch hateful to thee, Gerte?" the boy asked.

"The witch? Oh, Mele—she treats me well enough. My mother died. I had no one to care for me. She took me—and she is kind in a way. But always we are driven about—always we

ACROSS PLOUGHED ACRES

are hungry! We have had no food since yesterday, so when she comes back and finds the falcon gone, she will be very angry since she wished to sell it! Yes, Hubert, this time I am sore afraid of her!"

Tears filled the girl's eyes. She reached down, and picking up the falcon, placed it on Hubert's wrist.

"But take him to the castle!" she said firmly.

Hubert's eyes danced as the hawk settled down upon his wrist.

"But see, Gerte," he cried, "He feels at home! Is he not a noble creature? Look at Sire Falcon!"

But Gerte was sobbing bitterly and she did not answer.

Hubert glanced at her and the happiness faded from his face.

"Do not cry, Gerte," he begged. "Canst thou not stand a beating?"

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"A beating—yes. But she will be very angry and so will Sned, the trader—and—yes, I am frightened. Moreover I am faint for want of food."

Hubert regarded her with a puzzled air. He could not leave this pitiful creature here to face the old woman and the trader.

"She shall not beat thee nor do thee worse, Gerte!" The boy threw his head back proudly and held out his left hand. "Come with me," he commanded.

"But where?" Gerte inquired. "Thou canst not take me home. Thy mother would not have me in the house. And Mele would find me and drag me away!"

"Nay, nay, foolish one," Hubert answered. "Of a certainty my mother would not have thee in the house! There would be no room for thee, anyway. But thou canst go with me to the castle."

"To the castle!" A look of utter consterna-

ACROSS PLOUGHED ACRES

tion swept over Gerte's face. "To the castle! Art thou bewitched?"

Hubert settled the falcon more firmly on his wrist and grasped her hand.

"I have a plan," he replied. "A favor done deserves a boon. Come, trust me, good Gerte."

Gerte pressed her lips together. What could he mean? But she trusted him. Moreover, almost anything would be preferable to waiting for Mele and facing her without the falcon.

"Keep close behind me, Gerte," Hubert directed her. "There are many dangers in the forest. Come, we must reach the castle as soon as possible."

The children scuttled through the thicket surrounding the entrance to the glen, and padded softly through the woods.

Hubert wished to avoid any by-passers, so he kept within the edge of the forest until he reached the spot where they must set out to cross the fields to reach the castle.

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High on the bluff, above the river, and overlooking the surrounding countryside towered the turrets and walls and the great donjon * where lived the baron and many of his retainers.

Hubert motioned to Gerte to come out into the open.

"Let us hide behind the crops when we can," he whispered. "It would not be wise that my father, or, perchance Mele should see us. Bend low, Gerte, and hasten."

So they scampered along, skirting the lands ploughed by the peasants with great difficulty to produce the rations to take them through the winter.

"Acre, full-fed, bring forth fodder for men," Hubert muttered as Jean had taught him to do, "that each of all the corns may come unto our need!"

** The donjon, or the powerful part of the castle, was a huge, square tower.*

ACROSS PLOUGHED ACRES

In the distance they could see the bent figure of a laborer building a rude fence in a vain attempt to keep the hosts of rabbits from his grain.

Suddenly Hubert stopped and crossed his fingers. Gerte looked at him in surprise as he began to chant,

“Thou shalt not fly to the wood,
Thou shalt not escape me,
Nor go away from me.”

Gerte nodded her head in complete understanding when she caught the words. Of course Hubert was looking at a bee, caught in a brier, and, like every peasant who saw a captive honey-gatherer, he was making a wish.

“I am wishing that we may get safely to the castle,” he explained.

In sooth, Hubert had reason to worry and to wish that he might reach the Lady Jonquile

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without mishap. Every odd was against him. There were chances of meeting boys returning from work in the fields and he knew that they would certainly torment Gerte. Then, too, Jean would be short of temper should he see them. Should Gerber, the forester, in charge of the baronial grazing-grounds and forests, be roaming abroad, he would, no doubt, snap his fingers at the boy, take the falcon and return it himself to its young mistress. A mere peasant had no chance with Gerber when he asserted his authority.

They were about one-fourth of the way across the level lands when Hubert caught Gerte's arm. "Quickly! Crouch down, Gerte. Someone is coming!"

They sank to their knees behind some thickly growing wheat. Gerte peeked through it.

"A lad—a man ——" she breathed.

ACROSS PLOUGHED ACRES

Hubert, too, caught a full glimpse of the approaching figures.

"It is Jean and the Rat," he whispered. "Be still, Gerte."

The children scarcely breathed as the stoop-shouldered farmer and the skinny boy passed close by them. No, Jean did not see them. Hubert sighed with relief. But his relief turned to dismay, for the Rat turned his head over his shoulder and looked full into his brother's face.

Hubert placed his finger to his lips and pointed to the falcon. Jean was still trudging away toward home leaving the Rat behind. The boy stopped and watched his father. But Jean without a backward glance went on, for his thoughts were all on his coming supper. His figure became smaller and smaller as he hurried along. When it was only a dot against the waving wheat, the Rat turned and ran swiftly back to the crouching boy and girl.

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"The falcon? The witch-girl?" he questioned.

"Yes," Hubert answered, "'Tis too long a tale to relate, Rat. We are on our way to the castle and we must hurry."

"And I go with thee," the Rat announced.

"But our father ——" Hubert began.

"Is sore angry with thee, that thou brought not the oxen," the Rat finished the sentence. "We shall both be beaten soundly, my brother. But to the castle I go."

Hubert smiled. "Let us be on our way then!" he cried. "Sire Falcon longs for his home. Come Gerte, be not afraid of the Rat. He will not hurt thee, since thou art my friend."

The rest of the journey across the ploughed piece was without event. They now came to the road leading to the castle walls. But Hubert did not follow it. He kept his charges

ACROSS PLOUGHED ACRES

within the dappled shadows of the great trees skirting the thoroughfare over which passed peasants bearing burdens for the castle.

Just how he was to pass the porter at the gates he did not know. He did not fear for himself or Gerte or the Rat, for peasants were allowed to enter the outer courtyard without question in times of peace. But the falcon? He feared that a passing yokel or a soldier might take it from him.

So he turned toward Gerte and the Rat. "Step close to me," he commanded. "Keep as near the falcon as thou art able. When I nod at the porter run quickly through the gates."

But his words were drowned by a great din, the blowing of trumpets, the trampling of horses's feet, the shouting of men! The children scampered from the shelter of the trees to the roadside. Exactly opposite the spot where they were standing pranced a milk-white horse and on its back sat a resplendent

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figure clad in black and gold. The herald placed a slender trumpet to his lips and blew three, long, clear notes.

"Make way! Make way," he cried, "for the great Duke of Vertebois!"



CHAPTER IV

Sned, the One-Eyed

UP THE winding road leading to the castle climbed the long procession of nobles and ladies, men-at-arms and attendants making up the retinue of the Duke of Vertebois. The sunlight glittered across flashing steel, brightened the ducal colors of black and gold, and flickered across the face of the great duke mounted on his huge black horse.

To the children it was a wonderful sight. Jean had never allowed Hubert and the Rat to go to the castle on gala days, though he and his wife and daughters never missed a

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chance to enjoy the festivities and largesse. As for Gerte, she was quite overcome at the splendor of the scene and her mouth hung open so comically that Hubert burst into laughter.

One of the men-at-arms glanced at him and he shrank back into the shadows of the trees. But he took care to hold the falcon close to his side. When the half-score of pack-horses, laden with bulky objects, had clattered through the gates, Hubert touched the Rat's shoulder.

"Come, brother," he said, "let us join in here with the last of the procession. No one will notice us. Here—Gerte must keep close to me on this side, and thou must conceal Sire Falcon on the other as best thou canst. Now, then, hurry!"

They scampered out into the road among the motley crowd of beggars and peasants

bringing up the rear of the procession. None noticed the falcon for the Rat snuggled close against Hubert and quite concealed the bird from curious eyes.

Ah, this was indeed a gala day! Every peasant who had heard of the duke's visit to the barony was on the castle road. But the news had not reached the ears of Jean. Hubert smiled at his own good fortune.

The falcon on the boy's wrist squirmed and ruffled his feathers. His eyes were hooded by the rag which Mele had tied about them, but he seemed to sense the confusion.

Hubert wondered, too, if the hawk might not be hungry. A bit of food would taste good to them all. He thought of the rabbit stew which Yvonne would now be serving in the dark kitchen of her mud and thatch house. Hungry? He was famished!

The crowd having passed the gate to the

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barbican* was surging across the lists** toward the drawbridge spanning the moat.*** Today the great oaken gates were wide open and the chief porter, assisted by four men-at-arms, was scanning the crowd for undesirable guests.

"See! There is Giles, the blacksmith," the Rat whispered to Hubert, as they entered the outer court or bailey.† "And Timeon, the armourer," he added.

"'Tis said he is the best maker of armour in France," Hubert replied. "Would that I might learn from him the great trade! If Baron Wilfred would but send for me to enter his service!"

The Rat laughed. "Oh, Hubert, thou art

* *The barbican was the outer palisade of the castle.*

** *The lists was an open space between the barbican and the castle proper.*

*** *The moat was a huge ditch filled with water.*

† *The castle bailey contained the stables, the blacksmith shop, the carpenter's shop, the armourer's workshop, the hawk-house, the great castle oven, and the living-quarters of the lesser servants.*

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indeed a dreamer! Thy life will be spent in the fields in back-breaking work! An armourer! Ha! Ha!"

"Hush, Rat," Hubert placed a restraining hand on the boy's skinny arm. "Some are beginning to look at us. Should they see the falcon and take him away before we see the Lady Jonquile ——"

He paused as he felt a firm grip on his shoulder. Turning his head, he looked up into the plump face of a man towering above him.

"What dost thou wish of me?" the boy asked.

"A question only, lad. What dost thou wish of this falcon?"

"'Tis the hunting-hawk of the Lady Jonquile."

"Here, give it to me." Robert, the steward, whirled Hubert around.

"Nay, the lady said I should bring it to her."

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Robert clutched at the bird. "Be not foolish, Yokel," he said.

But he had reckoned without Gerte. Scratching and biting in the rough manner she had learned while protecting herself from the village boys, she sprang at him like a young wolf.

Robert loosened his hold on the falcon and turned his attention to the girl. Quick as a flash, Hubert, followed by the Rat, sped across the court. He had quite forgotten Gerte for his one idea was to take the falcon to the Lady Jonquile. Suddenly he recalled his promise to protect the witch-girl. He looked over his shoulder. She was nowhere to be seen.

"Where is Gerte?" he called to the Rat. "We cannot leave her. She hath never before been here. We must go back."

"Nay, Hubert," the Rat begged. "Robert is very angry!"

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"The more reason why we cannot leave her," Hubert replied.

So back again the two boys ran to find Robert shaking Gerte until her coarse black hair stood out around her head. The steward's eyes flashed when he saw the boys.

"Indeed, thou shalt be punished!" he cried. "A good flogging for all!"

"Where art thou, Robert?" A shrill voice called. "The master is demanding thee to consult further about the feast in the duke's honor. Hasten! His temper is becoming short!"

Robert straightened his jerkin. "Look thou," he said to the servant who had summoned him. "Help me to put these wild creatures in safe-keeping until I return." He glanced about him. "Into the armourer's shop with them. Here, take thou the biting girl!"

Unlike many of the other out-buildings, the armourer's shop was guarded by huge oaken

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doors to protect the precious contents from the weather.

"In thou shalt go, my pretties!" the steward cried.

Shutting the door behind him, he fastened it with the huge, wooden cross-piece kept for the purpose.

Some seconds passed before Hubert could get his breath. Robert had a powerful hand and he had pushed the boy flat down upon the floor. His first thought was for the falcon, but as he righted himself he found that the hawk was safe. Robert had not as yet taken it. Oh, if he might escape and carry Sire Falcon to the Lady Jonquile before the man returned!

With one arm and knee he pressed against the door. He could not move it. Even with the help of the Rat and Gerte the heavy timbers did not creak.

Hubert looked despairingly about him. There was no way out. Then, in the midst of

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the gloom, he saw a ray of light. He ran toward it and found that it came from a crack in the right wall. Hubert stood on tiptoe to examine the place. There seemed to be an opening in the wall with a piece of plank roughly laid across it. Perhaps the armourer opened it in rainy weather that he might have more light for his work. Hubert called softly to Gerte and the Rat to help him. The three children pulled on the plank. It fell to the ground with a crash.

Hubert peered through the narrow opening. "Thou canst crawl through, Rat," he whispered. "Hasten to unbar the door, but take great care lest none see thee!"

When the door was opened, Gerte and Hubert joined the Rat outside the shop. The children scuttled forward, edging their way among the throng.

Close by the inner drawbridge, the crowd had stopped. There was a great humming and

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buzzing of excitement. Hubert motioned for the Rat and Gerte to keep close beside him.

"And thou wilt go for the falcon thyself!" a shrill voice was screaming. "Then shall I go to the great duke and tell the thing thou wouldst keep hidden!"

"'Tis Mele," Gerte whispered. "See, she is talking to one-eyed Sned, the trader. She is very angry!"

And, in truth, Mele was angry. She was shaking her fist in the face of the one-eyed man. But at her last words, he struck her in the mouth.

"Hush, thou witch!" he cried. "Indeed, thou shalt go before the baron for stealing a falcon. Here, men, dost thou not know that this woman was ordered from the barony! Moreover, she hath stolen a falcon. I can prove it. Seize her."

At his words, two guards started toward the old woman, but before they could reach her,

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she had pulled herself from Sned's clutches and was running over the drawbridge across the inner courtyard toward the great hall. At the very doors the guards seized her, but squirming from their clutches the witch bounded forward and entered the apartment.

Gerte clutched Hubert's arm. "See!" she whispered, "Sned is looking at us. Hasten, Hubert!"

"Yes, let us hasten," Hubert replied. "Come, Rat, keep close beside the falcon. Now—all together—run!"

But Sned had seen them. His one eye gleamed. He took no notice of the Rat and shrugged his shoulders as he caught sight of Gerte.

"Quick! He is looking at us!" Gerte cried.

"'Tis the falcon! Mele told him," Hubert answered.

Knocking people right and left in his hurry, the man was pushing his way toward them.

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"Hurry, Rat," Hubert murmured. "None can run as fast as thou! Here, take the falcon—run! Follow him, Gerte, and I shall fall against Sned and try to trip him!"

Dodging this way and that, the Rat ran as he had never run before. Behind him scampered the panting Gerte, fear of Sned giving wings to her feet. No one heeded them—just another pair of wild children celebrating the festal hour.

But to Hubert's great surprise, the one-eyed man paid not the least bit of attention to the Rat and Gerte. He was coming straight toward him. This was indeed passing strange! Sned must have seen him pass the falcon to the Rat! It was certainly puzzling.

Pushing two or three women aside, Sned approached Hubert. Never, thought the boy, had he seen so ugly a man. He had caught sight of him before in Jean's dark kitchen where he was holding whispered consulta-

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tions with the farmer. But this was the first time that he had viewed the man in the open.

Hubert looked up into the trader's swarthy face and in spite of himself he shivered.

"Who art thou?" Sned asked abruptly.

"Hubert, son of Jean, the farmer."

A strange look passed over the leering face, and the long, white scar across the man's seamed right cheek grew livid.

"Ah! So I thought! Three summers and winters have passed since I have seen thee, lad—but thou hast not changed!"

The trader's words brought a forgotten picture to the boy. Jean had awakened him as he lay asleep on his rude bed of bark and straw and had led him to the center of the kitchen. The one-eyed man was sitting before the fire.

His words came back to Hubert. "He is growing well, Jean. But I am paying thee to keep him. But should any question thee never forget that he is *thy* son."

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Yes, Hubert remembered it all! And he recalled, too, how Sned had fingered the dagger at his belt and how Jean had bowed and cowered.

"And why art thou here, Hubert, son of Jean?" the trader was now asking. "It is not wise for Jean to forget that I told him to keep thee ever from the castle." His face darkened. "Come with me, lad."

"Nay, nay!" the boy expostulated. "I cannot. I—that is—I have business with the Lady Jonquile!"

"Thou art joking, lad! Thy business is with me." Sned's fingers grasped the boy's shoulder firmly. "Come, it will do thee no good to squirm. Thou canst not help thyself when I say come!"

Alas! Hubert knew that the trader spoke the truth. He had no chance against Sned's strength. He looked over his shoulder. The Rat and Gerte were nowhere to be seen. There

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was no one to help him! He wondered what Sned desired of him, but whatever it might be, he was at the trader's mercy. It might be a merry adventure, yet he felt that there was something sinister behind it all. And the falcon! He could not return it to the Lady Jonquile! Again he tried to squirm away from Sned's grasp.

"Be quiet, lad," Sned cried angrily, "else it be the worse for thee!" His hand slid down the boy's arm and clutched it savagely.

Hubert resisted no longer and Sned led him toward the lower end of the courtyard.

CHAPTER V

Long Live the Duke!

WHEN the young Lady Jonquile left Hubert standing by the thorn tree, she struck her palfrey with her bare hand and cantered after Sire Claire.

The squire was quite out of patience with her, for he feared the anger of Baron Wilfred and Lady Margaret. They would never excuse the delay should their daughter not be at the castle to greet the great Duke of Vertebois.

But to Lady Jonquile the loss of the falcon was a most serious affair. She had been quite haughty with her young brothers because she,

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a twelve-year-old girl, owned a falcon like a grown-up knight or lady, while they had to be content with sparrow-hawks. She hated to face them with the news that she had lost her treasure. Moreover, she had forfeited the duke's gift! What would her mother say?

Mayhap the peasant boy would find it. She would reward him well. Should she give him a greyhound pup? No, a yokel's son could have no use for one of the high-bred beauties. A golden chain would be more to his fancy.

She liked that boy. He did not seem like a peasant. He reminded her of someone. Who was it? Just as she clattered across the outer drawbridge it came to her.

"Sire Claire! Sire Claire!" she called. "Wait."

The squire pulled his horse to its haunches and looked back. Part of his training as a knight consisted in courtesy to ladies. Yet he was annoyed at being stopped, for he wished

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to reach the castle in time to meet his illustrious uncle with great honor and dignity.

Jonquile pulled up beside him and leaned far out from her saddle.

"Dost know, Sire Claire," she said earnestly, "that boy we saw at the forest edge reflects thy image."

Sire Claire stared at the baron's daughter. Of all the stupid remarks and of all the times for making it! Well, there was no accounting for the ways of young damsels. Were she his sister he would have shaken her. He gave her a scornful look and dashed on toward the castle.

Jonquile, quite crestfallen, followed her escort until she reached the castle bailey. Servants were running hither and thither. Hens were scratching in the straw strewn in spots on the dirty pavement. Horses were champing restlessly in the stables. From the blacksmith shop sounded the ringing of hammered

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metals. From the hawk-house came shrill screams. Tears smarted in the girl's eyes at the sound and she bit her lip to keep from crying. Her prized falcon was not there with his mates to receive his ration of raw meat.

Passing through a gate the girl entered an inner courtyard. The bustle and confusion of hurrying people was everywhere and the numerous retainers seemed to be falling over each other in their flurry.

Jonquile waited for Sire Claire to help her dismount and then hurried into the great hall of the castle. Surely the great duke and his duchess would soon arrive and she was not yet dressed to receive them!

Baron Wilfred was a great man, but the Duke of Vertebois to whom he did homage was far more powerful. He did not often deign to visit the castle, so his visit would mean feastings and joustings, dole for the beggars, gifts for retainers, and holidays for all.

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Jonquile passed on to the chamber where her mother, surrounded by tiring-women, was dressing for the great occasion. As the girl came toward the baroness, the women stepped back.

"Jonquile! Jonquile! Where hast thou been?" the great lady cried. "Hurry, I pray thee! Any time now the duke and duchess may arrive. Here, Berthe, assist the Lady Jonquile. Her embroidered robe, Mathilde. Here, lazy ones, do hurry!"

"But, lady mother," the girl interrupted, "I must tell thee a matter of importance. I—I—have lost the falcon which the duke ——"

The baroness threw her jeweled hands high above her head.

"Jonquile!" she wailed. "The falcon? Thou hast lost it?"

But the long notes of the trumpet interrupted Lady Margaret's chidings. She sprang to her feet.

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"The signal! The duke is at the gates! Hasten, hasten wenches!"

The tiring-women began to run about and the apartment was filled with the noise of their chattering. For the time being the baroness overlooked the loss of the falcon.

The Lady Jonquile's amber braids were laced with ribbons and her embroidered green silk garment was arranged in graceful folds about her pointed shoes of bright red leather. At her mother's signal she entered the hall now hung with valued tapestries and with its floor covered with fresh rushes. Here her father and her young brothers awaited them.

Had the guests been of lesser degree the baron would have met them at the door of the hall; were they lesser still, he would not have left his canopied seat. Since the duke approached it was seemly that he and his family should meet them at the gate of the outer courtyard. So Baron Wilfred gave orders that

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his family and his retainers should hasten for already the clatter of horses' hooves could be heard on the first drawbridge.

As Lady Jonquile passed the chief sentry at the gate, she motioned to him.

The man knelt and kissed her extended hand.

"Jacques," she whispered, "should a black-eyed peasant lad bearing my gauntlet for a token come for admittance, have him sent to me at once."

The guard nodded and arose.

The gates were now flung wide open and the duke's soldiers, preceded by the herald, tramped through. The duke bowed and smiled for he was a kindly man and the veiled lady beside him nodded to the baron's retainers.

But the eyes of many of the throng were upon a litter, draped with heavy silken curtains, and borne by huge men.

The duke dismounted, greeted his host and

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vassal with a kiss on either cheek, bent over the hand of the baroness, smiled at Squire Claire and the young sons of the baron, and then bowed to the Lady Jonquile.

"And here is my little Lady Jonquile!" he cried, his fine eyes twinkling. "And how is she advancing in the noble art of falconry?"

Jonquile glanced at Sire Claire and her cheeks flushed. Then she bowed low in the manner taught her by her mother and looked up at the duke.

"I thank thee for the falcon, noble lord," she said sweetly, recalling the words of the speech that she had so often rehearsed. "Whenever he soars nobly aloft, then swoops in regal splendor for his prey, my grateful thoughts turn to thee, my duke and my liege lord."

"Prettily said! Prettily said!" the duke replied. "On the morrow we shall see how well the bird hath been trained."

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Jonquile turned abruptly and shrank behind the ample folds of her mother's gown, while Sire Claire bit his lip and avoided her eyes.

The women of the duchess had now pulled away her veils and she was in turn greeting her friends. She was so tiny that she seemed like a girl, but her face was lined and her eyes were full of sorrow.

Jonquile had listened to the gossip of her mother and her maids and she knew that the august lady was sad because her only child, Sire Victor, was so frail.

The immediate families of the duke and the baron now followed the men bearing the litter into the inner courtyard and on to the hall.

Here the baron led the duke to his own canopied chair, while his wife reached out her hand to assist the duchess to a seat beside him.

But the duchess waved aside her hostess' hand.

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"I would see how Sire Victor stood the long journey," she murmured.

The bearers set down the litter and one of the women pulled aside the curtains. Sire Claire motioned her aside and drew the silken folds far back. He reached down and assisted to his feet a slight figure clad in golden silk. And so they stood together, the weakling heir to a powerful duchy and the stalwart young squire who must ever bear his cousin's standards into battle!

Jonquile's eyes filled with tears as she looked at the shrunken body, the white cheeks, and sunken dark eyes of Sire Victor. Yet she noticed that he held his head proudly and smiled at the people who were doing him homage.

He held out his hand to his mother and she led him gently to the seat beside the duke.

Sire Claire stepped back, almost tripping over Jonquile's foot as he did so. He scowled

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at his own awkwardness, then grinned as the girl raised her eyebrows.

"Clumsy one!" she murmured, for she dearly loved to tease this lad her father was training.

When she looked again at the son of the great Duke of Vertebois her lips forgot their teasing smile.

"Is it not sad?" she whispered. "He looks so kind, so noble, and yet I fear that he will never ride in the chase nor mount the great war-horse ——"

Sire Claire shook his head. "The duke and duchess love him dearly, yet they grieve because he cannot join in the sports of other lads. Had his brother lived ——"

"His brother!" Jonquile interrupted. "I knew not that the duke had another son!"

The squire nodded. "They speak not of it since it is a cross to bear. The other was but

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a babe when they lost him while on a trip to Paris!"

Jonquile's eyes were round with excitement. "Lost him?" she gasped. "How?"

"Ah, 'tis a mystery," Squire Claire replied. "One night the bonny babe disappeared. There was a rumor he was stolen. The nurse ——"

The young squire's explanation was interrupted by the Lady Margaret. "My daughter," she was saying, "our noble duchess is weary. Do thou escort her to her apartments while I ——"

But the baroness' command was never completed, for such a din and commotion was taking place at the very door of the great hall that everyone turned to see what was happening. Catching up his javelin, Baron Wilfred started forward just as a whirling bundle of rags and tangled hair dashed toward him. Behind surged two soldiers clutching at the tat-

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tered garments of old Mele who had escaped them and had come straight into the presence of the duke, himself.

Baron Wilfred's eyes blazed. "Witch woman!" he cried. "What doest thou here? Knowest thou not that thou art banished? Take her away! Whip her from the domain!"

"Mercy! Mercy, noble lord!" screamed the hag.

Then catching sight of the Lady Jonquile standing wide-eyed beside her mother, she stretched up her withered hands.

"Mercy! Mercy, little lady!" she whined. "Thou art young and beautiful. Have mercy!"

Jonquile's lips quivered. She had often seen her father condemn the peasants to punishments but this was the first time that one of them had appealed directly to her. She touched her father's arm.

"Oh, noble father, whip her not! See, she is old and weak! Let her take her witch pow-

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ers elsewhere, but whip her not, I beseech thee."

"And I have a message," the old woman whimpered, "for the great Duke of Vertebois!"

"For me?" the duke's voice rang through the hall. "This is indeed a merry joke! Come, hag, tell it quickly and begone. Had the little Jonquile not interceded I should suggest to Baron Wilfred that he throw thee in the castle moat. What is thy great message?"

"'Tis of thy lost son," the old woman whined.

The duke's fingers clutched the arms of the great oaken chair. Before he could get to his feet, his wife had run down the steps leading from the dais and was grasping Mele's shoulder.

"Speak, witch," she commanded. "Tell me of my son."

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The duke had now joined the group clustering about the woman.

"Yes, speak," he commanded, "lest thou die, oh, evil one!"

Mele threw herself face down upon the floor at the duke's feet.

"He liveth," she blubbered. "He liveth! Nay, kill me not!"



CHAPTER VI

Among the Cheeses

THE din in the bailey was deafening. The duke's retainers mingled with those of the baron and laughed and gossiped gaily while grooms were leading the travel-worn horses to the shelter of the long, thatch-roofed stables near the gate.

Sned pushed his way through the throng toward this stable. From it came the sound of the neighing and stamping of Petumin, Baron Wilfred's great war-horse who was as carefully guarded as the young sons of the master. The barking of the staghounds and boar-

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hounds and growlings of the fierce pack of bloodhounds confined in the kennels opposite the stables added to the confusion and noise. Pigs grunted as they rooted through the straw left from bedding the horses and hens picked at the ricks of hay piled against the building.

"This way, lad," Sned called, jerking Hubert along. "'Tis my opinion the good abbot and his monks will have a present from our liege lord in honor of the great duke's coming. "'Twill be of interest to thee, if my thoughts be true."

Hubert had no time to wonder how Sned had surmised that the rude wooden cart to which a strong little donkey was hitched would be standing behind the hayrick. His head whirled in his efforts to keep up with his captor and not have his arm pulled out of joint.

The cart was piled high with cheeses, some large, some small—white, yellow and green

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like rich fruits from a giant's garden. Beside the donkey stood a heavy-faced youth, his full lips hanging loosely open.

"Who art thou?" Sned asked as he brought Hubert to an abrupt standstill.

"Bimbi, the Orphan, and it please thee, good master."

"Ah, ha! Bimbi a good name, the name of a lad of parts," Sned chuckled, "and whither goest thou, Master Bimbi?"

Bimbi pouted. "Use thy one-eye," he retorted and nodded toward the mound of cheeses.

Sned reached out his free hand and grasped Bimbi's shoulder so that he yelped with pain.

"Yes, it hurts!" Sned growled. "And more thou wilt be hurt unless a civil answer is given to a civil question from Sned, the One-eyed! And now, again, whither art thou bound?"

"To the monastery with this gift for the abbot and the brothers," Bimbi whimpered.

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"'Twas thus I thought," Sned replied in a voice of satisfaction. "Here, good Bimbi, hand me that leather thong thou hast dropped down there behind thee. Yes, that is right." Then he looked down at Hubert. "Up in the cart there among the fragrant cheeses, oh Hubert, son of Jean!"

Hubert's eyes flashed and he braced his feet. "Nay," he cried, "I go not in the cart!"

Never had he felt such a hand of iron. The grip on Bimbi's shoulder had been but a featherweight compared to that which wrung his arm. He clenched his teeth to keep from screaming aloud in agony.

Then Sned swung him into the cart and flung him on top of a huge green cheese. With his knife he swiftly cut the thong in two parts, binding one firmly about Hubert's wrists, and the other about his left ankle and attaching it to the side of the cart.

"There, my fine one, thou *will* ride," he

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cried. "And my husky Bimbi," he continued as he put a final knot in the ankle-fastening, "listen to me. I am Sned, the trader, and a man thou must not trick. On with thee. Drive thy cart. But do thou as I say, lest I kill thee when thou dost return." He touched his knife significantly and Bimbi shivered. "Before thou leavest the cheeses at the monastery, stop in the village outside and find Ambrose, a servant of the monks. Give him this message. Say Sned, the trader, bids that thou hide this lad until he comes. He thinks it will be to-morrow night, but he hath first other work to do. Dost understand, good Bimbi?"

The cart driver nodded and struck the donkey's flank. The wooden wheels of the cart creaked, began to turn over, and with Bimbi walking on one side of the donkey and Sned on the other, the cart rumbled through the gates of the barbican, across the outer draw-bridge and out into the lists. At the cattle-

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sheds Sned left them and turned back toward the castle.

The cheese upon which Hubert sat rolled about unsteadily so that he nearly lost his balance. Bimbi trudged sturdily on without glancing behind him. Hubert looked down at his tied hands. If he could only get them undone, untie his ankle and run for the castle to find Gerte and the Rat. He hoped they were taking good care of Sire Falcon. Oh, if he might get to the castle! But the donkey was slowly but surely carrying him farther and farther away from the great donjon where the colors of the duke hung over the banner of the baron.

The rough road led toward the river. Across the fields Hubert could see the thatched huts of the village, but the road wound away from it. He vaguely knew that the monastery lay to the east. He had once gone with Jean to the outskirts of the well-

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cultivated fields which were part of the abbey lands, but he had never seen the village where the servitors of the monks and their families lived, nor the great buildings where the good brothers dwelt in saintly contemplation. At another time he might have enjoyed this journey to an unknown portion of the barony, but to-day he had no heart in it.

"Bimbi!" he called suddenly. "Good Bimbi! See, yonder lies the village where I live. I am the son of Jean, the farmer. Let me go, I pray thee, for Jean will be sore vexed should I not be there to help him. He hath a strong arm, Bimbi. So stop thy cart and let me out ——"

But Bimbi walked along and shook his head.

"Nay, son of Jean," he croaked. "Should I do that the one-eyed man might kill me, and I care not to die."

"Is the one-eyed man greater than the Baron Wilfred?" Hubert asked.

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Bimbi turned his head. "Be not so foolish," he commanded. "But what hath our great baron to do with thee? Ha! Ha! A good joke indeed!"

Hubert twisted around upon the cheese. "Listen, Bimbi," he said softly, "joke or not, what wouldst thou say had I the token of the Lady Jonquile, our baron's daughter?"

"Ha! Ha!" Bimbi shrieked with laughter. "Thou hast not the wits of the cart-donkey! A token of the Lady Jonquile! Ha! Ha!"

"But I could show thee!"

"Hey, there, donkey, whoa!" Bimbi cried, tugging at the strap by which he guided the animal. "Let us stop and take a look at this thy brother sitting on the cheeses here. Well, hand over thy token, son of Jean."

Hubert looked down at the dirty hand stretched up over the side of the cart and shook his head.

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"Can I show thee the token unless I am untied?" he asked.

Bimbi scratched his head. "Nay," he conceded, "but Sned, the One-eyed ——"

"Will never know, I tell thee," Hubert smiled at the cart driver.

"That is true," Bimbi conceded. "That is true. Perhaps I might do it. But wouldst thou tell Sned that I untied thy hands?"

Hubert laughed merrily. "Indeed, I would never tell him that! Untie me, good Bimbi."

Bimbi dropped the donkey strap, and the sturdy little beast began to nibble at the grass. Hubert eagerly waited for the driver to come near him. He had a plan for escape mapped out. He was aching to try it. His one chance lay in the forest where he could hide until he had a chance to get to the castle. The sun shone brightly. He forgot the shadows of the places where the wild boar lurked. He remembered only his promise to Lady Jonquile.

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Bimbi shuffled around the cart and stretched out his hands. But he paused in the very act of untying the knot binding Hubert's wrists. His small eyes squinted in the sunlight and reminded the eager boy looking down at him of the eyes of the pigs rooting in the straw in the castle courtyard.

"Hasten, good Bimbi," he urged. "Hurry."

"Mayhap I care not to see the token," Bimbi said slowly.

Hubert's smile vanished. His one hope of escape lay in getting Bimbi to unbind his hands.

"Bimbi," he said earnestly, "such a wonderful thing thou hast never seen! Golden threads ——"

Bimbi's pig-like eyes gleamed. "Have thy way," he grunted. "Show it me."

"Then unleash my hands."

Hubert fairly held his breath as the cart-driver picked and tugged at the knot which

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Sned had so firmly tied. He sat quietly on the cheese while the process of untying went on, but every muscle of his lithe body was taut with his eagerness. Ah, at last the knot gave way. The noose slipped and widened as he drew his hands apart and he was free. He slid his right hand down beside his leg and began to loosen the strap binding his ankle. Sned had not thought it necessary to tie it securely. The noose widened readily. He gave a quick twist with his ankle and knew that he was free from the strap. Hubert jumped to his feet, but Bimbi laid a restraining hand on him.

"Sit thee down, foolish one!" he cried. "I told thee not to stand but to show me only the token."

"'Tis true, Bimbi," Hubert answered. "I stand that I may better reach inside my tunic. See!" Slowly he thrust his hand inside the bundle of rags which served him as a cover-

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ing and drew forth the packet in the leaves. Then he turned, slipped the packet back into its hiding-place and began leaping over the cheeses toward the front of the cart.

"Come on, Bimbi, come and get thy view of the token!" he shouted.

Bimbi ground his yellow teeth with rage, and with an agility quite surprising in one of his weight sprang into the cart. Hubert looked over his shoulder. The cart-driver was right behind him. His fingers were clutching at his tunic.

Reaching down he picked up a round yellow cheese, and hurled it straight at the donkey's back, at the same time leaping from the cart.

The donkey jumped, spread his feet apart and stopped short, and then began running straight across a wheat field while Bimbi sprawled in the cart bottom and cheeses were hurled in all directions.

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Without another glance at the catastrophe he had made, Hubert bounded toward the forest. Just where the trees met the wheat he looked back, but Bimbi and his cart were nowhere to be seen. He dared not turn about and start for the castle. He would wait in the forest until he could be certain that Bimbi had left the neighborhood.

An hour passed while Hubert skulked along the outskirts of the forest path; then he came out and trotted away in the direction of the castle. If all went well he might make it before dark. His hopes were high and he began to whistle softly. He pictured Lady Jonquile receiving the token and saw himself telling her how he had found her prized falcon. But his dreaming ceased as did his whistling, for as he came around the border of waving grain, he found himself face to face with the grazing donkey, eating as peacefully as if he had never been hit with a cheese. At a little distance,

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one side tipped in the air, lay the cart while cheeses glistened here and there among the tall grass. There was no clew as to Bimbi's whereabouts.

A cheese lay almost at Hubert's feet. He was hungry. He picked it up. The donkey continued grazing peacefully. Then Hubert caught sight of a black spot growing smaller and smaller in the distance. Yes, it was Bimbi on his way back to the castle. He had evidently thought it best to carry his story to Sned.

Hubert tucked his cheese under his arm, and turned back again toward the forest. He dared not go to the castle until after dark.

CHAPTER VII

The Adventures of the Rat and Gerte

“TRA la! Tra la! Tra la!”

THE Rat peered out from behind a gate tower at the entrance of the inner courtyard where he and Gerte had scampered when Sned, the One-Eyed, had borne Hubert away. Sire Falcon was perched on the Rat's wrist. He was growing uneasy and squirmed and ruffled his feathers angrily.

Gerte looked over the Rat's shoulder, trying to catch a glimpse of the crowd of retainers who were clustering in a circle about a gay, prancing figure.

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"Oh, see!" she cried, "'tis Jacques, the jongleur. He hath finished his song. How I wish we could have heard it! I've listened to him singing in the village, and it was wonderful! Oh, Rat, let us run out and listen to his music!"

Her eyes shone and her heavy face brightened. It was plain to see that Gerte was a lover of the song and dance.

The Rat was cautious. He was thinking of Hubert. He placed his finger to his lips. "Sh! Crazy art thou!" he replied. "Wouldst have them all come to question us about the falcon before we find Hubert? Be quiet, Gerte. See, girl, 'tis our chance to run."

Gerte pouted. But her disappointment was short lived. She, too, remembered that Hubert trusted them and that he had put the falcon in their charge.

"Thou art right," she agreed. "Everyone is

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looking at Jacques now. We should hurry
away."

The Rat nodded. "Come, let us hurry back
of the crowd," he whispered. "If we are quiet,
none will notice us. Here, Gerte, carry thou
Sire Falcon. I think he likes me none too well,
for he pecked at my arm just now and his beak
is sharp."

The children had chosen the time for get-
ting away wisely. None of the giggling
wenches or merry men-at-arms, intent upon
their gladsome holiday, cared aught for a
ragged, starved-looking boy or unkempt beg-
gar girl. Children, such as these, could be
found anywhere in a barony of thirteenth cen-
tury France. And, moreover, Jacques, adorned
in parti-colored red and white tunic, his feath-
ered cap set roguishly over one eye and mer-
rily pulling the strings of his guitar, was a
sight that filled their eyes to the exclusion of
all else.

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Today, the jongleur was not alone. He had brought with him a band of amusement makers who were attracted to the castle by the extra gifts sure to be given in honor of the duke's visit. To be sure, Jacques would take a percentage from all these strolling players, for he was under the baron's protection and the castle was considered his ground for the plying of his profession. The wandering minstrels were resting for the time when they should be called to the great hall to entertain the gentry with songs and juggling tricks.

Good-natured Jacques heeded the requests of the throng in the courtyard that he tell them a story and sing his latest song. Now, the verses finished, he broke into the jingling rhythm of a dance. One of the duke's men-at-arms caught the hand of a scullery-maid; the armourer's apprentice pulled a farmer's wife into the circle; the head baker and his assistants pirouetted and whirled, and soon every

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man, woman and child in the courtyard was taking part in the merry dance.

Even the Rat's bare toes twitched. It would be such fun to join in that mad twirling!

Sire Falcon pecked at Gerte's arm.

"Let us go, else Hubert be so far away we can never find him," she said softly.

"Come, then," the Rat replied, "keep close behind me."

"But where?" Gerte asked suddenly, for she remembered that they did not know Hubert's whereabouts.

The Rat pointed to the lower end of the outer bailey. "Sned, the One-Eyed went that way. Hurry and let none see Sire Falcon."

So the children came out of their hiding-place and scampered across the courtyard. When they reached the great cookhouse, placed outside the castle proper for fear of fire, Gerte stopped.

"Hasten, thou foolish one," the Rat said

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crossly. "If anyone should see us with Sire Falcon, well thou knowest what will happen."

Tears stood in Gerte's eyes. "I cannot," she wailed. "I am famished. Oh, canst thou not smell that roasting sheep? The odor tears my stomach apart!"

The Rat sniffed. Over the fire hung a great sheep, while a boy turned it on the spit. It was plain to be seen that this lad was ordered not to leave his post though the castle be filled with minstrels. He shook his fist at the children and they hurried on.

The bakehouse stood near the cookhouse. The Rat and Gerte stopped in front of it. No one was there. All the bakers had followed Jacques. But spread out on an oak plank were ten small wheaten loaves, the tag-ends of the last baking.

The Rat sprang toward them. He had no thought of stealing, for he had been trained

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in a hard school of bitter poverty and in times of famine he foraged for himself. Quickly he snatched two small loaves and, beckoning Gerte to follow, ran swiftly behind the bake-house.

The hungry children tore the loaves in shreds. It was the first white bread either of them had ever eaten, for they had known only the coarse, sodden, black rye bread of the peasants. They crammed the pieces into their mouths and swallowed without half chewing them.

Gerte looked down at Sire Falcon, huddled in a dejected heap on her wrist. With a piece of bread half way to her mouth, she stopped.

"Sire Falcon must be hungry, too!" she cried. "He hath had naught to eat since Mele and I found him."

"Hungry! He may well be!" mumbled the Rat with his mouth half full of bread. "Give him of thy bread, Gerte."

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So Gerte crumbled a bit of the bread and held it under the falcon's beak but he would not eat.

"Perhaps should we untie his eyes and he could see it, he might eat," the Rat suggested.

He untied the dirty rag binding the bird's eyes and again they offered him crumbled bread. He huddled down into his feathers. The children stared at each other in puzzled silence. Both were thinking of the terrible misfortune should the young hawk die. Gerte touched his head gently with her fingers. He paid no attention to her.

"He needs meat," she said. "Mele told me that hawks eat meat—raw meat. She planned to kill some field mice for his dinner."

"Then meat he must have," the Rat declared.

"But how?"

"That I cannot say. But we must find some. We cannot let him die."

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So once more they set out on their venture. They paused in front of the hawk-house where the falcons were screaming and shrieking. Sire Falcon paid no attention to the calls of his kindred. He did not open his eyes.

The Rat now knew that the hawk was in great need of food. Somehow, somewhere, he must find it. The kennels stood next to the hawk-house. There were new inmates in them today, for one of the duke's presents to his vassal was a pack of ten mammoth boar-hounds. The dogs had been fed, and the keeper had now gone to join the merry-makers. Great savage creatures they were, ferocious as gaunt wolves. They munched their bones and stared at the children with wicked eyes. A piece of raw meat had fallen just beyond the reach of the leader of the pack. He tugged at his heavy chain and tried to get the meat with his paw. It was just too far away. He could not quite reach it.

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The Rat looked at the meat, then at the dog. The beast growled and tugged at the leash. The boy touched the meat with his bare toe. The dog roared and jumped. The Rat shivered. If the dog could reach him, he would tear him in bits.

"Keep thy meat," he muttered.

Then he looked at Sire Falcon. It was evident that the hawk must be fed. Like a darting weasel, the Rat reached down and grasped the meat. The dog roared and his toe-nail scratched the boy's foot. The Rat howled with the pain, but his cries were drowned by the din of the barking and yelping of the pack.

"Run, Gerte, run," he panted, "over behind that hayrick there. This noise will bring the keeper. Run!"

Gerte steadied the falcon on her wrist; the Rat clutched the meat and they scuttled for the hayrick. Snuggling down into the hay,

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they remained very quiet for a time. The barking of the dogs gradually died down.

When the children became convinced that no one was looking for them, they decided to feed the falcon. The Rat found a sharp stone and they scraped off bits of meat. At first the bird ate languidly. Then he opened his eyes and began to peck at the juicy bits in Gerte's outspread palm.

But the Rat was growing uneasy. If they were to find Hubert, they must start soon. He jumped up from his seat on the hay. Suddenly he placed his hand on Gerte's arm. On the other side of the hayrick, two people were talking.

Getting down on his hands and knees, the boy crawled to a position from which he could see them. He jerked himself back beside Gerte.

"'Tis Sned," he whispered. "He's talking

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to a cart-boy. Be very quiet. We may hear something of Hubert."

The children scarcely dared breathe as they listened to the conversation. At first, it seemed quite without meaning, for the cart-boy was blubbering with terror. Now and then there was a word of a cart, cheeses, a donkey. Then some statement about a boy riding in a cart.

Gerte looked at the Rat and her eyes asked a question. He nodded.

"It might be Hubert," his lips formed the words he dare not speak.

"He ran away—I could not stop him—he went into the forest. Do not blame me, Sned, thou canst not," the cart-boy begged.

Gerte and the Rat both shuddered at the anger in the trader's voice.

"Thou fool!" he hissed. "And thou didst let that lad escape! I can do nothing now, for I have other fish to spear. But I shall find

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him, never fear. As for thee—I told thee of thy punishment.”

There was a scream of terror from the cart-boy. The Rat peered around the hayrick just in time to see him speeding toward the inner gates of the courtyard with Sned in full pursuit.

“Our chance,” the Rat cried. “Run, run, Gerte, for the outer gates.”

Keeping the falcon well hidden at her side, Gerte followed the speeding Rat. The guards made no protest at letting these peasant children through. They ran down the road toward the fields. Then the Rat slowed down and turned toward Gerte.

“He said Hubert was in the forest.” He shuddered. “But we must find him, Gerte, even if we do go in there.”

“I fear the forest,” Gerte replied. “I am sore afraid. Perchance he will come out.”

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"Nay, we must go to the forest edge," the Rat said firmly.

He wheeled about and began to trudge along the outside of the holdings. Gerte trotted after him. But her heart was heavy. She had been so glad to leave the forest that morning with Hubert before she saw a demon, a ghost, a witch or the terrible wild boar—a demon in animal form.

No peasants were working in the fields to-day. All were enjoying the holiday, so no one stopped the children. When they reached the thorn bushes growing on the forest border, they paused.

"Look out everywhere, Gerte," the boy commanded. "Perchance Hubert awaits us here. Hubert! Hubert!" he called.

The only answer was the breeze playing through the fields and then the call of a black-bird.

Again the Rat called. When no one an-

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swered him, he seized Gerte's hand. His face was white and he shivered, but his lips were firm.

"Be—not—afraid," he stammered. "We must enter the forest and call to him there."

Gerte looked at the dark shadows before them, then she glanced at the sunlight flecking the fields. They were safe and peaceful, but the trees covered unknown dangers. She tossed her hair out of her eyes and took a step forward.

So, hand in hand, the two children entered the forest.

CHAPTER VIII

In the Forest

STILL munching his cheese, Hubert came to the forest edge. He sat down in the shade of a thorn bush to wait until Bimbi had quite disappeared from the vicinity. He intended, then, to go to the castle.

He was tired. His eyes blinked slowly and his head began to nod. It was comfortable there in the shade. He could not keep his eyes open. Ah, well, forty winks would make no difference and the distance between himself and Bimbi would become greater meanwhile. So he stretched himself out on the ground and,

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pillowing his head on his arms, fell sound asleep.

When he awakened at last, the shadow cast by the thorn bush had lengthened. It was time that he should start for the castle. But he needed water. He must have a drink before he commenced the long walk. Once when he had gone with Jean to gather some faggots allowed them by the chief forester he found a brook just inside the forest. He made up his mind to dash in, get some water, and then hurry to the castle.

The woods were beautiful. Though Hubert feared them, he loved the great trees, too. Walking farther and farther into the shadows, he looked for the stream. Yes, there it was, rippling along between the mossy banks topped by giant oaks. He ran toward the brook and, kneeling down, drank his fill from its sparkling waters. Then he wiped his mouth with the corner of his tunic and stood up.

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A path of sunlight penetrated into the depths of the shadows cast by the oak trees. It glanced among the branches and flecked the shallows of the stream.

Hubert was looking straight at it. He realized that he must be alert for all the dangers of the hunting preserve and he had seen something moving in the sunlit path. The object was growing larger and was coming farther out into the sunlight. Could it be a deer or perhaps one of the antlered stags which had been known to attack a man? No, this creature did not move with the graceful delicacy of a deer, nor did it stand proudly like a gallant stag. Hubert crept behind the trunk of a nearby oak and looked around it. Then he clapped his hands over his mouth to stifle the cry rising to his lips.

The moving mass had now taken the outlines of the great body, ugly snout and crafty eyes of a huge wild boar. He was rooting for

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worms in this lair between two fallen oaks. Hubert could hear him snuffling and snorting while he hunted his tid-bits. Once the boar lifted its head and the boy saw the long tusches, deadly enough to rip open man or beast.

With all his heart, Hubert wished that he had not ventured into the forest. Better be thirsty than to meet the animal feared by the peasants beyond anything else in the preserve. But here he was alone in the forest, and there was the boar!

Hubert dared not move, for he feared that even the faintest crackling of a twig might attract the boar's attention. Every now and then the creature raised his ugly head and peered about as if he realized that all was not well in his refuge.

The boy's heart beat violently. Would the boar never finish his meal and be gone, he wondered. But the worms in this particular

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spot seemed to be quite to his liking. He snuffled and swallowed with great relish.

Hubert looked around. He had heard the merest sound of pattering feet, padding across the ground. Three red-eyed, wild dogs were coming out of a covert and were skulking toward the boar. Just last week Hubert had heard a forester tell Jean that the preserve was becoming infested with these dogs and that it must be cleared of them since they were spoiling the baron's hunting. Hubert had been told that they greatly relished wild boar meat, but that on account of the animal's ferocity, they always hunted him in packs. Now, as he watched, more dogs began to come from the shadows. The leader, a lank and muscular fellow, was slinking toward the boar. He raised his head. His eyes gleamed wickedly and he began to paw up the earth with his front feet.

Nearer and nearer crept the dogs. The boar bellowed with rage. Dogs appeared on all

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sides. The boar backed himself against one of the fallen oaks. He was taking a stand for a fight. Still the dogs came on. The boar again tossed his head and bellowed. A half-dozen of the hungry enemy seeing that he was at bay, sprang at him. There was a darting of dark bodies,—a shower of flying moss and turf. Fangs gleamed, great mouths slobbered; the boar's tusks flashed. With a horrible cry, a dog fell over, his side ripped wide open.

Hubert forgot to be frightened. His sympathies were with the boar in this duel. He stepped from behind the tree that he might better watch the fray. One dog after another was killed or wounded. Minutes passed. Three-quarters of an hour went by and the fight was still on. Now the boar was becoming winded. He was gasping and choking. A dog leaped upon his back. He tried to throw him off and failed. The forest rang with the snarls of the dogs and the roars of the boar.

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Around and around whirled the maddened boar. Underbrush crashed ; branches snapped. It seemed that the boar must be conquered. He fought with desperate courage. Then, with a last mighty lurch, he unseated his assailant. And, like a mad thing, he rushed at the dogs. Right and left he cannonaded. The dogs yelped and began to retreat. Only the leader of the pack remained near the enemy and tried to drive him back against the fallen tree. Suddenly, the boar stood erect, and, spreading his great feet, threw himself upon the dog and killed it. The boar had conquered, but he did not relax his vigilance and continued to wallow back and forth, bellowing his anger to his forest world.

Hubert knew that he must get back into his hiding-place. Raising himself on his tiptoes, he began to creep toward his tree. He would remain there until the boar went away, then he would run as he had never run before. He

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glanced over his shoulder. The boar was coming toward him. How stupid he was! The creature was seeking water. Hubert leaped and landed on a hummock of moss near the tree. The boar had not seen him.

But just at the minute when he felt himself quite secure, voices rang through the forest.

"Hubert! Hubert! Where art thou, Hubert?"

He looked around. Two figures were running toward him. The Rat and Gerte! He tried to wave his hand—to stop them—but they did not understand his message. Gerte threw up her hand in reply.

"There he is! There he is!" she cried.

Hubert attempted to call to them to turn and run the other way as quickly as they could. The words would not come to his frightened lips. The boar had seen them. Suddenly, the boy felt quite sick. The ugly creature bellowed loud. Maddened as he was over his victory

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with the dogs, he would kill anything he saw. He started straight toward the children. Gerte screamed with terror and the falcon on her wrist fluttered his wings uneasily.

Hubert turned to face the boar. How the creature's eyes glared! How his tusks flashed! The boy had no weapons and he could not fight the boar with his bare hands. He looked down that he might not see this terrible oncoming death. Then he had a fleeting glimpse of how he might stop it. It was a chance in a hundred and he had but a second in which to test it. If he failed he could never try again. On the bank of the brook rippling at his feet he had noticed a large stone. Reaching down, he picked it up. Then raising himself on his toes, with all his strength, he flung it straight at the boar. The stone struck the animal between his eyes. He staggered—roared—lurched—groaned—and then fell crashing into the water.



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Hubert wiped the sweat from his forehead. He felt suddenly faint. He knew that the boar was not killed, but he was stunned. It would take more than the strength of a twelve-year-old boy to kill such a strong animal.

"Hasten! Hasten!" he cried. "Climb the tree! Here, Gerte, give me Sire Falcon. There, up thou must go. Now, Rat!"

He almost forced the children up into the big oak. Then he followed quickly after them. The boar lay in the brook for some minutes. He kicked his feet, groaned and opened his eyes. Finally he raised himself on his front legs and peered about as if wondering where he was and what had happened.

The children silently watched his struggles. After a time, he stood up and drank some water. This seemed to revive him and he tossed his head about and bellowed. Scrambling up over the bank of the brook, he stood almost under the oak tree where the children were

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hiding. And, just at that particular minute, Gerte almost fell from her seat among the branches. If the boys had not clutched her, she would have certainly dropped to the ground at the boar's feet.

The movement among the trees caught the boar's attention. He looked up and saw them. Then, indeed, did he become one of the demons of which the peasants talked as they sat in their huts at nightfall. He stamped, tore up the ground in his mad rage and his bellowings were terrible to hear.

Gerte began to whimper with fright.

"Be quiet," Hubert whispered. "He will tire himself out and go away."

The shadows lengthened. Twilight came and went. Night began to close about them. Still the boar kept his vigil. Sometimes he would stop and hunt for worms, but always he came back to the tree. The children dared

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not come down. They now knew that they must spend the night in the forest.

Gerte's experience had given Hubert a hint as to what they must do.

"We cannot sleep, lest we fall from the tree and be trampled by the boar," he warned his companions. "So to keep awake, let us tell of our experiences."

And, indeed, they had much to tell. They whispered together, while the boar snuffled beneath the tree.

"So Sned will look for me again," Hubert said thoughtfully when the Rat had finished his story. "I wonder why. I know not that I have done aught to cross him in any way. I do not understand it at all."

"Perchance it is the falcon," Gerte suggested.

"Nay," Hubert replied. "It was not the falcon. He paid not the least attention to anything but me."

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Then for a long time there was silence. The Rat nodded and Hubert poked his ribs. The younger boy rubbed his eyes.

"Oh, if I but might sleep a second!" he whined.

It was Gerte who thought of the plan of taking turns. Let each one have a nap, she suggested, while the other two held the sleeper on the limb. The scheme worked well, but the night hours were long. None of the children would ever forget the irksome hours they spent in the oak tree in the baron's hunting preserve.

Then, just when it seemed as if they could not bear the darkness and the fatigue another instant, the birds began to twitter and the forest began to come to life. The light flickered through the darkness. Dawn was coming.

Hubert peered down to see if the boar had gone. No, he was still there. He was resting,

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but once in a while he opened his eyes to see that nothing menaced him.

The children were hungry and cold. Sire Falcon, huddled down into his feathers, sat on Hubert's wrist. Gerte yawned. Then, without warning, she began to cry bitterly. The Rat's face was tired and worn. Suddenly Hubert puckered up his lips and began to whistle, softly at first, then more loudly and merrily. It was a strange sound to be coming from the tree-tops.

The boar scrambled to his feet and snorted with rage, but the merry sound continued. Gerte wiped away her tears and gulped back her sobs. The Rat's face brightened. And Hubert whistled on, attempting to keep up his own courage as well as his companions'. How they were ever to get out of the tree, he did not know. He tried not to think what would happen should one of them fall.

Just at the time when it seemed as if he

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could never pucker his lips to form another whistle, a gay sound came winding through the trees. The children listened, trying not to disturb the echo with as much as their own breathing.

"The hunting-horn! The hunting-horn!" Hubert shouted quite unmindful of the enemy beneath the oak. "Baron Wilfred is riding in the hunt! Ah, ha! Old pig!" he taunted, leaning over the branch and shaking his fist at the boar. "Dost thou hear that, demon? Our baron seeks thee! Indeed, he hunts thee! Beware!"

The prisoners in the oak-tree sat rigidly on their limb, hoping that the hunters would ride their way and release them.

CHAPTER IX

The Winding Horns

THE young Lady Jonquile opened her eyes, then shut them quickly. She was so sleepy! Why didn't Brinda, the youngest tiring-maid, keep away! How horrid she was to tug and tug at her shoulder!

Jonquile pulled the silken coverlet high above her head and snuggled down into the soft mass of feathers on which she rested.

"Come, come, Lady Jonquile!" Brinda's voice was cross. "Indeed, thou wilt be late for the hunting!"

Ah, yes, now Jonquile remembered. She sat

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up in bed. Pushing aside the curtains through which Brinda was poking her head, she jumped out on the fur rug spread down for her to dress upon.

“Quick! Quick! Oh, thou lazy one, my clothes!” she cried. “Hasten, lest I be late. Is it yet dawn?”

Brinda was snatching Jonquile’s garments from the wooden pegs near the bed. She had lighted a torch set in a metal holder and it added to the flickering light of the wax taper which had burned all night by the bed of the baron’s daughter. Yet the great apartment was filled with dark shadows not to be driven away by the candle light.

This was Jonquile’s first boar-hunt. She had been allowed to go on this one because the great duke had asked it as a favor to himself. How delighted she had been when the chief huntsman had brought news of the great wild boar seen by some of the peasants. It meant

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tracking the creature before a hunt with the hawks was arranged. She hoped against hope that the peasant boy might find the falcon to-day. The boar-hunt gave her a few hours more before she had to tell her father of her loss.

The thought of the falcon brought to her mind the events of the previous afternoon. As she dressed, she thought of the witch who had called upon her for protection. The old woman had fallen down in some kind of a sickness. Had it not been for the duchess, old Mele had been thrown into the castle moat, for the duke was angry and the baron exceedingly annoyed that the hag had dared to enter the hall. But the duchess had begged that she might be spared for the time being and had asked to have her carried to a safe place to be nursed back to consciousness.

"Perchance she doth lie," the august lady said, "but then again she may speak the truth.

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Oh, my lord, give me the chance to find out if she knows of my lost one."

The duke had frowned, but he did not deny his wife's request.

The cocks were crowing as Jonquile hurried into the hall. She had omitted her bath in a big wooden tub filled with perfumed water since she dared not linger, but she had washed her hands in the basin offered her by Brinda and had dried them on the towel the maid extended.

In the hall, servants were running hither and thither. They were carrying trenchers of bread and goblets of wine to the baron and his squires. It was the only breakfast they would have, but the hunting party would be back for the ten o'clock dinner if all went well.

The baroness bade her children wait for the duke and duchess before eating their bread, but the baron hastened his breakfast since he must go to the outer courtyard to see that the

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hunt was properly assembled. Around Baron Wilfred's neck hung the hunting-horn of ivory which had been his father's and his grandfather's before him. Never did he ride in the chase without it for its piercing notes could be heard at a distance of over a mile. Sire Claire carried the knight's hunting-bow and arrows and two other squires bore the spear and hunting-knife and axe.

The coming of the duke and duchess was the signal for the frugal breakfast to begin. When Jonquile bowed to them, she noticed that the duke looked stern and sad and that his wife's eyes were swollen with weeping.

In company with her young brothers, Lady Jonquile followed her elders to the courtyard. Grooms had brought the horses and everybody mounted in the bailey. There was confusion everywhere. Each person anywhere about the castle had turned out to see the hunt start, it seemed. Horses pranced and neighed.

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Three packs of dogs—the lithe grayhounds being taken for exercise rather than real hunting, the boar-hounds eager for the fray and the new pack, the gift of the duke, tugged at their leashes and dragged their keepers about.

The baron placed the horn to his lips. As the loud blast sounded, the company began to ride toward the drawbridge. Other horns rang out, the dogs began to bay, and the drawbridge resounded with the clatter of hooves.

Jonquile's eyes flashed. She loved every bit of it. If she could have forgotten the loss of her falcon and the duchess' sad face she would have been very happy.

Over in the sky the streak of light was growing larger. The cavalcade rode down from the castle. Soon it had reached the fields. Here the baron stopped and held a conference with the head huntsman. The man pointed across the waving wheat and rye. But the master shook his head and began to ride along the

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outside of the holdings. Baron Wilfred did not like to cross the peasants' acres unless it was absolutely necessary. Of course if the quarry chose to enter the fields, he followed after it, thinking all the time of the hard luck for his people.

At the edge of the forest the baron again called a halt. The chief huntsman signalled the keepers to unleash the dogs. They began to whine and to run around through the thicket. Suddenly one of the new dogs gave a quick yelp, and, baying loudly, dashed into the preserve. After him poured dogs, horses, keepers and beaters.

Jonquile looked about her. This was her first visit to the interior of the forest, though she had ridden about the outskirts of the preserve. The hunting party dashed on while from the dogs came such a yelping as the young girl had never before heard.

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"They've found the boar! The dogs have found the boar!" came the calls from all sides.

Jonquile had no thought of fear. She urged her horse to a spot under an oak tree where she might see all that was happening. Backed against another huge oak stood an ugly boar. He was balancing on his hind legs and striking in the air with his front feet. His tusks gleamed and his eyes shone with a wicked light. Up to this terrible creature dashed the leader of the hounds. The boar struck it down.

Baron Wilfred sprang from his horse and held his hand out toward a squire to receive his spear. The dog was valuable and the boar must suffer for his dastardly deed. But before the knight could run up to the terrible foe, the duke held up his hand.

"Let Sire Claire kill the boar," he commanded. "He is trying for his knighting. Let us gaze upon his prowess as a huntsman."

Jonquile's eyes sparkled. She knew how

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happy Sire Claire would be to have this opportunity. Just yesterday he had told her the methods he should use whenever he should be lucky enough to attack a boar. She leaned far out of her saddle that she might better see Sire Claire win his honors. But she was not destined to observe the end of the hunt, for the boar had fled.

The baron and Sire Claire sprang again upon their horses and once again the chase was on. But before Lady Jonquile had a chance to start her horse, she heard her own name being called from the branches of the tree above her.

“Lady Jonquile! Lady Jonquile!”

She looked up to see the face of the peasant boy she had met by the thorn bush. And what was that he was holding down to her? Her falcon!

“Oh, Yokel, thou hast found my treasure!” she cried.

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"'Tis Sire Falcon, indeed, sweet lady," the lad replied as he began to clamber down from the tree.

He was not alone. Two dirty, ragged figures followed him and stood shyly beside the girl's horse. But Jonquile had no thought for them. She was engrossed with her restored falcon.

"Where didst thou find him, Yokel?" she asked.

And so Hubert began the story of the falcon and of the children's attempts to carry it to her. The tale completed, Lady Jonquile smiled at him graciously.

"Thou art, indeed, a kindly yokel," she said. "Thou must go with me to the castle to be suitably rewarded." She turned toward the Rat, who was shyly digging his bare toes into the moist earth. "And thou, too," she added, "for thou hast done thy part as well as this girl thou callest Gerte."

Gerte shook her head. "Nay, Lady," she

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replied, "I must find Mele, the witch woman. We are ordered from the barony. We may not stay now that thou hast thy falcon."

"The witch woman, sayest thou?" the Lady Jonquile looked puzzled. "But she is ill at the castle. The duchess waits for her to awaken that she may learn of the son she lost. Thou must go to her."

Now the horns were again winding. The hunting party was returning. At the head rode Squire Claire, preceded by four bearers carrying the body of the boar lashed to a stout limb. As they marched, their lusty voices rose in a song in which all the lords and ladies, the huntsmen and the beaters joined.

The boar is dead.

Lo, here is his head!

What man could have done more

Than his head off to strike,

Sire Claire-like,

And bring it as we do before?

HUBERT THE HAPPY

He, living spoiled
Where good men toiled,
Which made Sire Claire sorry,
And now dead and drawn,
Is very good brawn,
And we have brought it for ye!"

Sire Claire held his head proudly, for he had distinguished himself in the chase and had killed his first wild boar. When he saw the Lady Jonquile with the peasant children, he reined in his horse. At the same time the duke stopped and this was a signal for the entire company to pause.

Jonquile held up the falcon so that the young squire might see it. "Look, Sire Claire," she said, "the yokel, young Hubert, found my bonny bird." Then she slid down from her horse and swept a deep curtesy toward the duke who was bending from his saddle.

"See, Sire, my falcon!" she cried. "I have deceived thee, great duke. I lost the present thou gave to me, but this lad found it and hath

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given it back to me. Let not thy face darken with anger at me, I pray thee."

Like a bonny flower swaying on its stem she seemed as she stood beneath the shadows of the oak trees. The duke began to smile at the pretty picture and he touched the girl's golden hair with a gauntleted hand.

"Freely I forgive thee, sweet lady," he said. "And the lad—hast thou rewarded him?"

From the corner of her eye, Jonquile looked at her father and mother sitting silently on their horses. Perhaps they would not so freely forgive her negligence in regard to the falcon. Again she looked up into the face of the duke.

"Could we not take the lad and the peasant children who have helped me to the castle?" she asked. "There I shall find for them some tokens." She pointed to the Rat. "The boy is Hubert's brother and the girl belongs to Mele, the witch woman ——"

"The witch woman!" The duchess raised

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her head and turned toward the duke. "Give orders, my lord," she begged, "that all these children be taken to the castle. Perchance the girl may know something of what the woman babbled."

The duke's face saddened, but he commanded that the three children be lifted on the horses of three of the huntsmen. And, so in this wise, Hubert found himself seated in a place where he had often dreamed of being, on a horse's back, returning from the hunt. In spite of his fatigue and hunger, he was very happy.

Sire Claire assisted Lady Jonquile to her horse. Once again the bearers of the boar began to bawl out their song. The hunting-party started on again and had soon left the forest.

Only three or four peasants were working in the holdings. These had come down from the festivities at the castle to look after their acres. But among them was Jean, the farmer.

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He was not working, however, but was standing on the corner of his wheat field and was talking to a huge, one-eyed man who glowered and scowled at the peasant's words.

When the peasants in the field caught sight of the hunting party, they stopped work at once and began to join in the singing. The killing of the boar filled their hearts with joy. They feared him and were glad that he was dead, but they knew, too, that extra celebrations would be held in honor of the success of the hunt. Why should they work when pleasure abounded? Winter days were far away.

As the cavalcade left the outskirts of the holdings, Hubert glanced over his shoulder. He saw that Jean and Sned, the One-eyed, had joined the procession and were following on to the castle.

CHAPTER X

The Golden Chain

THE hunting-party clattered merrily into the bailey.

Hubert slid down from the horse, waved his hand to the huntsman, and waited for the Rat and Gerte to join him. It seemed strange now that he no longer had any responsibility about the falcon.

Gerte scampered up to him and soon the Rat was standing beside them. The children did not know exactly what to do with themselves. No one spoke to them, for everybody in the courtyard was excited and full of business.

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A great crowd had assembled around Sire Claire, who stood proudly beside the bearers of the boar.

A heavy hand gripped Hubert's shoulder. He knew that grasp, for he had felt it before. He was not surprised when he looked up into the ugly face of Sned, the One-Eyed. Behind him skulked Jean, the farmer.

"So thou thought to escape me, eh, Hubert?" the trader muttered. "Nay, that would be impossible. Moreover, thy father bids me take thee. Come thou with me."

"Indeed, and the lad cannot go with thee!" A sweet voice cried. Lady Jonquile was standing beside Gerte and her blue eyes were flashing. "What is the meaning of this? Hubert hath saved my falcon and I shall reward him. Take thy hand from his shoulder else I send a guard for my father or perchance the great duke himself."

"We have need of the lad, Lady," Sned

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whined. "He has been long enough from his duties."

Lady Jonquile stamped her foot. "Answer me not," she commanded. "Who art thou? Take thy hand from his shoulder as I told thee."

It was quite apparent that the baron's young daughter was not in the habit of being crossed by her inferiors. Yet Sned did not stir.

"Anger him not, Lady Jonquile," Gerte whispered. "He is a terrible person when he cannot have his own way. Often have I heard Mele say this."

Then it was that Sire Claire happened to glance in their direction. When he saw that Jonquile was speaking to the scowling trader, he walked quickly toward her.

"What is the trouble?" he asked.

Jonquile explained and the squire's face darkened.

"And he took Hubert away and put him in

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a cheese cart," Gerte announced unexpectedly, her fear of Sned leaving her now that Sire Claire had come.

"Well, begone thou one-eyed man," Sire Claire exclaimed arrogantly. "And thou, too," he added, turning to Jean. "I care not that thou art the lad's father and I like not this Sned's looks. Begone, both of you!"

Sned and Jean slunk away into the crowd and Sire Claire returned to his trophy of the hunt.

"Come," Lady Jonquile said to the children, "let us return my dear falcon to his home in the hawk-house. And then we will go for the reward."

At the falconry they were greeted by the keeper. Jonquile handed him the hawk, at the same time giving many suggestions for his care and comfort until the man smiled at her eagerness.

"Farewell, Sire Falcon," Hubert said softly.

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His adventures with the falcon were over. Soon he would be returning to the hovel he called home. There would be a beating. He could not escape it this time. Also, there was this question of Sned! Could it be possible that Jean intended to have him go away with the trader? The boy shuddered.

He had forgotten his companions. He remembered them again when he heard Gerte sobbing. Hubert turned toward her and touched her arm.

"Do not cry," he whispered. "We cannot help it that soon we must leave the castle."

"But I am tired and hungry and I know not where Mele is," Gerte whimpered.

Lady Jonquile's face filled with pity. "Indeed, thou must be hungry, Gerte, and tired, too!" she cried.

"I have eaten nothing for two days but a little bread," Gerte explained.

Jonquile looked at the ragged creature

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standing beside her. Usually she did not give much thought to the peasants but these children had taught her that they were human beings like herself.

"It is dinner time," she said. "The mob will be fed here in the bailey, but I wish thee to come to the garden where our tables will be spread. I will find thee a place to hide and will send thee food."

The children followed her outside the bailey to a lovely spot hedged off by itself. It was shaded by elms and dotted with beds of roses and lilies and marigolds, and flowers for which they knew no names. There were plots containing the useful herbs and the few vegetables which the baron's family desired. One end of the garden was arranged in terraces and there on a gray stone wall, covered with woodbine, used for garlands by the tiring-women, two gorgeous peafowl basked in the sun.

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With a cry of delight, Gerte stretched out her arms toward them.

Lady Jonquile clapped her hands. "See, I shall hide thee here behind this elm tree to watch the peafowl my mother loves. And mayhap the proud cock will spread his jewelled tail! It is a wondrous sight. Now I must run and make myself neat for the feast. Be quiet and soon I shall send thee food."

The children forgot they were hungry as they looked at the splendor of the scene before them. This dinner in the garden was to be a great feast for two reasons. It was the first state meal since the duke's arrival and an added beauty was to be given it because of Sire Claire's killing of the boar.

The great fireplace in the cookhouse was not large enough to take care of all the meats. Just over the hedge fires were kindled and over them servants were turning spits of chicken and geese or were sweating over huge

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cauldrons of boiling beef. The cookhouse fireplace was given up to the roasting whole of a stag which Gerber, the forester, had killed.

In the garden, trained servants were hurrying back and forth putting the finishing touches to the long tables spread out on trestles.

A loud blast from a trumpet held by a man-at-arms stationed on the wall above the peafowl, and the company began to come in through an opening in the hedge. At one side stood a page holding a jug of water and a small basin, while on the other side was stationed another bearing a towel.

The Rat nudged Hubert as each guest waited to have water poured over his fingers and then to have them wiped. But Hubert paid no attention to the Rat's nudges. He was looking at the frail boy in golden colored clothes who was leaning on the arm of a sol-

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dier and was following the duchess into the garden.

Baron Wilfred's canopy had been raised over a dais, but the baron did not occupy it, since it was right that the duke should sit above him. The soldier led the boy to a seat under the canopy, but the noble families were arranged in such a way that Lady Jonquile sat beside him.

From the cookhouse to the garden trotted the servants, bearing the numberless dishes prepared for the feast. But they were not allowed to hand them to the noble guests. This was one of the duties required of the squires Baron Wilfred was training and of his own sons. They took the dishes from the servants, and kneeling before each guest, presented them in order of rank. Squire Claire served his aunt and uncle and the frail son, and Hubert noticed how tenderly the proud young squire waited upon his cousin.

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Loaves of bread dotted the table and from them the guests cut slabs to serve as containers for their food. The only plates used were those of silver set before the duke and duchess and the baron and his wife.

The feast progressed in good earnest and the baron's carver made his fingers fly madly in his efforts to carve the pieces of roasted stag to be covered with herb sauce, the beef, the mutton and legs of pork which made up the first course of the dinner. When it seemed that no one could possibly eat more, another course of roasted capon, browned pheasants, filled with spices from the Indies, rabbits in rich gravies, and pastries containing small birds was brought in. This was followed by the cook's masterpiece, an enormous meat pie, steaming hot and borne by four servants. Jellies! Custards! Sweetmeats! The watching children could not keep track of all the kinds of food carried in to swell the great festival.

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Suddenly Gerte remembered that she was hungry and she sank back against the trunk of the tree, declaring that she could no longer look at people eating.

"Sit up, Gerte," the Rat commanded. "Be not so foolish. See, Lady Jonquile is speaking to a servant. I think she will soon send food to us since she knows thou art famished."

Hubert placed his finger to his lips and motioned for the Rat to cease his mumbling, for Sire Victor had tottered to his feet and was waving his hand for silence.

"My noble father," he called in his shrill, sweet voice, "our Lady Jonquile hath been telling me of the flight of her falcon and of the boy who found it. I would see this lad who spent his night in a tree while the evil boar stamped beneath it. There are other children with him. May they not come to table?"

Come to table! Such a thing was never heard before! In the bailey, crowds of peas-

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ants were feasting on the left-overs from the great dinner. But it was unthinkable that three children from the fields should be invited to come to the baron's table.

The duke looked at the baron and the baron looked at the duke.

"I would see them, Father!" Sire Victor cried again.

"And what doth our Lady Jonquile say?" asked the duke.

Jonquile flushed. She would not have dared to ask that her new friends might come to table, but she knew that the great duke never refused Sire Victor's few requests.

"They—are—hungry," she faltered, "and—they saved my falcon at great risk to themselves."

The duchess leaned over and whispered something to her husband and he nodded. "Bring them in," he commanded.

And so a servant was sent to the spot behind

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the elm tree to take the children to the table. The Rat dug his bare toes into the grass and muttered that he did not wish to eat with the gentry, and Gerte blushed as she thought that she was to go into the midst of such a gay company. But Hubert, his eyes shining and his head held proudly, walked toward the boy sitting under the silken canopy. And when he reached it, he knelt down and smiled up into that other pair of dark eyes gazing down at him.

Sire Victor raised his clasped hands and resting his chin upon them stared long at the merry face before him.

"It must be great fun," he said thoughtfully, "to run in the fields and yes, to spend a night in a tree in the forest."

And, suddenly, the kneeling boy knew this other lad spoke truly. It *was* fun to run in the fields, to venture into the forest, if one liked. He forgot his rags and his hunger and the

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back-breaking hours of hard work, and remembered only the blue skies, the spreading oak-trees, the wheat waving in the sunlight, and the lilting blackbirds. He rejoiced that he could run among them at will and not be carried in a soft litter as must the son of the duke should he go abroad. Hubert's eyes swept over the clothes of golden silk and rested at last upon the curiously woven chain of gold hanging about Sire Victor's neck, and the links of gold seemed to make a chain of bondage.

"I like thee, Yokel," Sire Victor continued, "and thou must sit here at my feet and eat thy dinner and tell me of thy adventures."

So, between mouthfuls of delicious food, such as he had never deamed of, Hubert related the story of the finding of the falcon and of the boar-hunt, but he said nothing of Sned, the One-Eyed.

Now the great feast was ending and Jacques, the jongleur, led in his band of

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merry-makers. But as he doffed his plumed cap and made a deep bow to the duke, Lady Jonquile stepped in front of him and swept the great man a curtsey.

"May I not reward Hubert before the singing begins?" she asked eagerly. "I wish to give him a golden chain for finding my falcon."

"A golden chain!" Sire Victor cried, before the duke could reply. "Here, sweet Jonquile, give the lad my chain." He began to raise it from his neck.

But Hubert shook his head. "I wish not a golden chain," he said. "I care not for a reward, only, Lady Jonquile, one favor I ask. Be kind to Gerte. Mele is sick. They have no home. May she not be befriended?"

Lady Jonquile looked up at her mother and the baroness nodded.

"I will befriend Gerte," she answered, "but thou must have thy golden chain, nevertheless."

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"Here it is," Sire Victor cried, holding out the gleaming strands. "Take it, Hubert."

But Hubert again shook his head. "I need it not," he said. "It would look passing strange among my rags."

"Why dost thou not take it, Hubert?" Gerte cried shrilly. "Thou art foolish, indeed. Mele hath one like it and she says it has great value."

"Mele hath a chain like that! Surely thou art mistaken, girl!" The duchess was standing up resting her trembling hand on the arm of the duke's chair.

Gerte pouted. Duchess or no duchess, she knew all about Mele's chain, for often when they were very hungry, the old woman had taken it off her neck and had considered selling it, but always she had decided against it.

"Indeed, great lady," the girl said, "Mele hath a chain just like the one Sire Victor is offering Hubert. I am not mistaken. It hangs about her neck."

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Suddenly the duchess sat down. Her face was very white. "Didst thou hear, my husband?" she murmured. "Our own goldsmith with the cunning fingers made two chains thou wilt remember. I told thee in the forest we would do well to bring this girl to the castle."

The duke reached over and placed his arm about his wife's shoulder, and his eyes were sad and full of pity.

"What you think is impossible," he said gently.

"I must find out for myself," the duchess cried. "Wilt thou not send Sire Claire to bring the old woman here?"

The duke sighed, but he motioned to the squire. He knelt down and kissed the back of his aunt's thin hand and she touched his head gently with her fingertips. Then he arose and went through the opening in the hedge.

Now the duke gave orders that the jongleur begin his performance. Soon the garden was

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filled with the strains of music from beribboned lutes and the sweet voices of many singers. In welcome to the duke, Jacques had arranged such a wonderful song that verses from it would be sung for many years following, when the Duke of Vertebois and all his family were long forgotten. This was followed by an imitation of the boar-hunt in which one of the minstrels represented the boar and the others the members of the hunting-party.

Hubert quite forgot the talk of the golden chain. He sat at Sire Victor's feet with the Rat and Gerte crouching beside him. What fun it was to watch the antics of the jongleurs! He laughed aloud as Jacques gave a long poetic recital of the killing of the boar. He wondered if Jacques could have told it as well had he spent a night in a tree with the creature grunting beneath it.

At the close of the recital, a clown leading

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a trick monkey capered before the ducal seats. The children clapped their hands with glee. Even Sire Victor laughed when the little creature climbed on Hubert's shoulder to reach a sweetmeat Jonquile held above him.

But, suddenly, all the music and the laughter stopped. Sire Claire was kneeling in front of the duchess.

"The old woman still sleeps," he said. "I cannot awaken her. But from her neck I took this chain."

He held out the golden trinket and the duchess snatched it from him. Then she laid it in her husband's outstretched palm.

"Look, my husband!" she sobbed. "'Tis of the same pattern as the chain Sire Victor hath worn all his life! Thou knowest who wore its mate!" Covering her face with her hands, she wept so violently that none could comfort her.

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As for Gerte, she preened herself like the peafowl on the wall.

“What did I tell thee?” she asked over and over again. “Was I not right? Had Mele not a chain like Sire Victor’s? What did I tell thee?”

And so she might have continued for hours had not the Rat pulled her down and bade her be seen and not heard.

The weeping duchess was led away by her women. Then the jongleurs once more began the music and the gaiety and dancing lasted until the deep shadows began to fall beneath the elm trees.

CHAPTER XI

Sned's Secret

HUBERT could not go to sleep. He would close his eyes and make up his mind that he just would not open them again, and then, pop, they would be wide open and he would be staring into the darkness.

A stone staircase led down to the apartments, used as the sleeping quarters of the humble guests of the castle. At the close of the festivities of the preceding evening, a servant had led Hubert and Gerte and the Rat into the great hall and down to the small room set off from the larger vaulted chamber.

SNED'S SECRET

On a straw bed in the corner lay old Mele. Here she had rested since her sickness had come upon her. By the light of the torch, held by the servant, she looked as quiet and white as the dead. Gerte had knelt beside her and had shaken her shoulder gently, but the old woman had paid no attention to any of them.

Hubert did not find his pallet of straw too hard. Compared with his bed in Jean's hut, this was fit for a king. Beside him the Rat breathed peacefully. Over in the opposite corner, he could hear Gerte rolling around and muttering in her sleep. He knew that she was worried about Mele, and that even in her sleep she was troubled.

Thinking about Mele made Hubert recall the curious chain she had worn about her neck. How did it happen that a witch should own a chain such as was worn only by nobles? He wondered if she had stolen it. Of course

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she had. How terrible would be her punishment should she recover.

Just then, curiously enough, Mele began to mutter. It was the first time since the children had come down to the chamber that she had made the least sound.

"Gerte!" she mumbled. "Gerte!"

But Gerte's restlessness had vanished, and she was sleeping quietly.

"Gerte—water—water ——" Saying the same words over and over again, the old woman rambled on.

Hubert sat up. Poor old thing! She was thirsty. He would get her some water. He had noticed a pitcher in the outer apartment. A few people were asleep there but he would take pains not to awaken them. He jumped up, and groping his way to the doorway, entered the other room. He crept carefully along until his hand touched the pitcher. He picked it up and started back to Mele.

SNED'S SECRET

Everybody in the castle had gone to bed in the early evening, for there was no way of successfully lighting the great chambers of the castle. Early to bed and early to rise was a motto which the baron carried out every day of his life.

"All is well!" called the sentry on the turret top.

Hubert knelt down beside Mele. Supporting her head, he held the pitcher to her mouth. She sipped the water, then began to drink it in great gulps. Hubert set down the pitcher and tried to steady her back to the bundle of straw serving as a pillow. But the old woman clutched at her throat and started up again.

"Gertel! Gertel!" she cried. "Where art thou? My golden chain! 'Tis gone! 'Tis gone!"

She screamed so loudly that he half-expected to see the occupants of the outer apartment in the room. But no one came except

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Gerte, who threw herself down beside Mele and patted her hand.

"Here, Mele, here I am. See, I am beside thee! Why art thou troubled, Mele?" she asked.

"The chain, Gerte!" Mele quavered. "'Tis gone. I meant to give it to the dark-eyed lad living with Jean, the farmer. Bend closer, Gerte. 'Tis his."

In his excitement, Hubert overturned the pitcher. It clattered on the stone floor and disturbed the Rat. He bounded toward them.

"What's the matter? What is it?" he demanded.

"Mele hath just discovered that her chain is gone," Hubert whispered, "and it hath destroyed her wits, indeed! What dost thou think? She says the chain is mine!"

"But the duke hath the chain ——" the Rat began.

"The duke! Call the duke!" Mele cried.

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"She hath indeed lost her wits!" the Rat murmured.

"Yet the great duchess made me promise that should Mele awaken, I should call her no matter what the hour," Gerte said slowly. "She sent her tiring-woman to the garden to tell me. So I think I shall go to the duke ——"

"Nay, Gerte, do not leave me," Mele implored. "A lad—send a lad—one spoke a few minutes since—send a lad!"

There was now complete silence. Here, in the darkness, the witch's request seemed quite absurd.

"Could we not wait till morning?" Hubert began.

But Mele was not to be satisfied in this way, and Gerte, remembering the command of the duchess, felt that they must not wait.

Hubert scrambled to his feet. "Of course I will go," he said doubtfully, "though I feel that I shall be beaten well for my pains."

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He felt his way to the other doorway opening into the corridor and began to climb the stairs. Two dimly burning tapers lighted the great hall. The huge fireplace seemed a well of darkness and shadows lurked about the wooden gallery built above the floor. In the semi-darkness the heads of the bears, tusks of boars, and antlers of the stags fastened to the blackened walls in the spaces where tapestries did not hang seemed to belong to live creatures of the night.

Hubert paused. He had not the least idea of the situation of the duke's apartments. How he was to find them he did not know. He began to walk toward a vaulted archway and was stopped by a man-at-arms who stepped out of the shadows.

"Be careful, my lad. What art thou doing here?" he asked.

Hubert looked at him. "I seek the duke," he replied.

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"The duke! Thou art indeed a brave lad! Nay, thou canst not see the duke nor canst thou remain here. Come with me," the soldier commanded.

"But good sir, I must find the duke," the boy answered.

The man-at-arms stared at him. "See here, thou must not trifle with me, lad," he said. "Hast thou lost thy wits?"

Certainly this guard meant what he said and had not the least intention of allowing Hubert to go to the duke's apartments. Oh, if only he had some token of admission! If only he could prove that he had some right to be in the castle!

"The Lady Jonquile," he began.

"Ah, yes!" the man-at-arms repeated after him. "The Lady Jonquile! And what hast thou to do with our baron's daughter?"

Then Hubert remembered the gauntlet. He had quite forgotten it. Reaching down into

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the neck of his tunic, he drew out the precious packet. The oak leaves were withered and brittle, but the embroidered glove was quite safe. He pulled the thorns from the packet and picked away the leaves. Then he handed the glove to the guard.

The man looked at it and the scowl left his face.

"Thou art right, Yokel," he said. "'Tis her glove. I wonder if thou art the lad of whom she told me. When I was on guard duty at the outer gate, she bade me admit a dark-eyed lad bearing her token. Tell me, art thou he?"

Hubert smiled. "I am, indeed," he replied. "And I must see the duke. The duchess hath told Gerte should Mele awaken ——"

"Art thou one of the children with the witch woman?" the man demanded. "Mayhap I should let thee by."

"Indeed, thou must," Hubert replied.

The guard stood silently considering the

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matter. Then he picked up a torch from the corner of the fireplace and lighting it from the taper handed it to Hubert.

"The duke sleeps in the apartment behind the dais," he said. "Go down the stone corridor and thou wilt find his guards. But, here, lad, take the glove. It may gain thee admittance since the great duke loves well our little lady."

So with the torch in one hand and the glove in the other, Hubert went out into the narrow corridor. It was full of shadows and the torch threw but little light. Hubert did not fear the darkness, but he was nervous about asking the duke's men-at-arms to awaken him. It seemed most absurd that a boy should make this demand. He would hurry on and have the ordeal over as soon as possible.

A shadow around the curve of the corridor began to move. There was a slight scuffling noise on the floor. It might be one of the huge rats infesting the castle. He held the torch

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high above his head and the light fell upon the face of Sned, the One-Eyed.

"Cry not aloud, my lad," a hoarse voice gurgled in his ears, "for no one will hear thy voice. Here, give me thy torch. Now turn about and we shall go back by the same route by which thou didst come!"

"Nay, Sned," the boy said firmly. "I have business with the duke. Let me go."

"Indeed I know well thy business," the man replied. "Have I not watched for many long hours to prevent it. Now, see here, lad, I am a strong man and thou art but a boy. Thou canst not evade me. Turn about."

Yes, Hubert knew that he had no chance against the strength of the trader. Unless a guard should happen to pass through the corridor they were alone and he would have no one to help him.

His hands fell limply to his sides and he made no resistance. But he made up his mind

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that when they should come into the great hall he would call to the man-at-arms who had befriended him.

Sned walked as silently as a cat. When they came into the hall, he gripped Hubert's shoulder and paused behind the dais. There was no sign of the guard. Then, forcing the boy ahead of him, he began to run with great strides toward the staircase.

Hubert's heart beat fast with excitement. So Sned was taking him back to Mele. He wondered why. But the trader did not enter the door to her chamber. Step by step he forced Hubert farther and farther down the staircase.

"Gerte! Gerte!" Hubert cried. "Sned taketh me away, Gerte!"

But there was no answer and they went farther and farther down the long, narrow stone steps.

"Watch thy step, lad," Sned cautioned him

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once, "for I have no liking to break thy neck, though I should have done so hadst thou awakened the castle."

He waved the torch about and Hubert could see that the staircase descended as far as his eye could see. The walls were damp when he touched them, and in some places they actually dripped with moisture. When they reached a barred iron door, he could hear the sound of rushing waters.

Here Sned stopped. "See, lad!" he cried, "the baron's dungeon. Let me tell thee something. Once the great duke had me put in that hole for a time, and the baron's jailer forgot me for four long days! Nay, do not shudder. This prison canst hurt thee not!"

Again they began the descent of the staircase. But at each step, Hubert shivered as he thought of the dungeon, and he began to pity Sned who had spent four days in the terrible place.

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Again Sned spoke to him and to Hubert's surprise, his voice was kind. "I tell thee not to be afraid, lad. I have no wish to mistreat thee, for thou art a plucky and resourceful stripling. I am but taking thee from the castle by the secret passage. It would indeed amuse Baron Wilfred should he know that a trusted retainer told me of it when we were in that prison hole together."

The sound of the rushing water was now so loud that Hubert did not at first hear the trader when he bade him crouch down and crawl through a narrow passageway on his hands and knees. Sned had extinguished the torch and the place was in utter darkness. It seemed to the boy that they crawled along the damp earth for miles, but it was really only a few minutes when bushes scratched his face and he looked up to see the stars twinkling above him.

Sned pulled Hubert to his feet. The boy

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looked around him. He made out the outlines of the great precipice above the roaring river and the castle looming darkly on its summit. Then he noticed that someone else was standing beside them.

"So thou art here, Jean?" Sned said. "Here is the lad. Take him home and this time keep him from the castle. After the jousting tomorrow I come for him. I like him well and I shall make of him a sharp trader. I would that we might start on our journey now, but lords and ladies from far and near will come for the jousting. I cannot let such good pickings escape me. Yet this night, lad, I promise thee shall be the last that thou sleepest in a peasant's hut!"

Surely Sned was passing a merry joke!

"'Tis true," the trader replied. "Soon shall we start our life together, my lad Hubert, and because thou art a promising lad I shall wreak on thee no vengeance, for the days I

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spent in the dungeon, but I shall teach thee to steal and to live by thy wits with the best of them!"

Hubert could not speak. He opened and shut his mouth a number of times and when the words finally did come Sned had disappeared into the darkness and Jean was pulling impatiently at his arm.



CHAPTER XII

Two Maids to the Rescue

PITTER-PATTER! Pitter-patter! Bare feet scampered over the stone floor of the Lady Jonquile's bed-chamber. The tiring-maid, asleep on the pallet beside the curtained bed, did not hear them. She was tired from the festivities and excitement of the night before. Lady Jonquile did not hear them for she was dreaming of the jousting to be held in honor of the duke.

Gerte parted the heavy curtains. By the light of the candle beside the bed she could see Jonquile's golden hair streaming over the

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embroidered coverlet. Forgetting that she was a beggar and that the other girl was the daughter of the baron, she tugged at a lock of the hair. Jonquile started but did not open her eyes. Again Gerte pulled.

"Stop! Stop!" Jonquile muttered and promptly fell sound asleep again.

Gerte reached farther inside the curtains and shook Jonquile's shoulder. This time she was successful. Jonquile sat up in bed and rubbed her eyes.

"What is it? What is it?" she demanded. She opened her eyes and stared up into Gerte's face. "Gerte!" she gasped. "Is it morning? Where are Hubert and the Rat?"

Gerte placed her fingers to her lips. "Sh!" she whispered. "'Tis nearing dawn, Lady. The Rat is with Mele and we know not where Hubert can be!"

Jonquile was now quite awake. "What dost thou mean?" she asked. She looked down at

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the tiring-maid who was beginning to stir in her sleep. "Quiet," she said. "Climb into bed and tell me. But do not awaken Brinda! She would never allow thee to stay here."

Stealthily Gerte clambered upon the mound of feather mattresses piled on the carved bedstead and let the curtains fall behind her. There in the darkness, the two girls whispered and plotted.

"And Hubert never came back," Gerte completed her story by saying. "Dost thou think the duke hath punished him? Once I dozed beside Mele and thought I heard him calling. It was but a dream, for when I started up, all was dark and still about me."

"And thou art certain he went to the duke, Gerte?"

"He started, Lady." Gerte replied. "I am afraid that some trouble hath befallen him. What I shall do, I know not since Mele talks more wildly each minute!"

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"Listen, Gerte," Jonquile said. "We must go to the duke and learn what hath happened. Canst thou climb out of bed and hand me my robe without awakening Brinda? Then take the taper from its holder and we will go."

Soon the girls were tiptoeing along the narrow corridor toward the great hall.

It had been the merest chance that had led Gerte to find Jonquile's room. Her life with Mele had taught her to use her eyes and ears to the best advantage and she had noticed that Jonquile had gone down this corridor when she had left the hall. But she had not the least idea as to the location of the duke's quarters.

Jonquile took the taper from Gerte's hand and fairly ran across the dimly lighted apartment. She stopped as the guard stepped out of the shadows and knelt before her.

"What seeketh thou, Lady?" he asked.

"A dark-eyed peasant boy, Jacques," Jon-

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quile said. "Hast thou seen him? He was on his way to the duke."

Jacques smiled. "Indeed, I have seen him, Lady. He had thy token. I sent him to the duke's apartments."

The two girls looked at each other and Gerte's face clouded. She hoped that she had not won Hubert a beating by her determination that he should seek the duke. Perhaps it would have been better to have waited for morning, after all.

But Jonquile was disappearing through an archway behind the dais and Gerte hurried after her. The corridor was long and seemingly without end. As they went around the curve which turned toward the rooms where the duke's retinue was quartered, Jonquile stooped and picked something from the floor.

"See, Gerte!" she cried. "Hubert did come this way. Look, the glove I gave him for a

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token! Hasten, that we may save him from the duke's anger!"

Dawn was just breaking as the girls came to the door of the duke's apartments. A man-at-arms stepped forward, but Jonquile waved him aside.

"I have business with the duke," she said.

But she did not so readily dispose of Sire Claire who was acting as chief squire to his uncle during his visit.*

He had just donned his clothes and was on his way to awaken the guest and to assist him in dressing. The duke's own first squire was bringing in a bowl of perfumed water and a towel and he turned to watch the scene.

"Indeed, Lady Jonquile," Sire Claire was saying, "I have seen thee do strange things, but why thou comest at dawn to this part of

** This was a mark of great honor paid to the duke by the baron.*

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the castle I understand not. Were thou my sister I should smack thee well."

"We have business with the duke!" Jonquile returned loftily.

"Business with the duke!" the squire exclaimed, "Go back to thy room, Lady, and wait until he comes to the great hall. His temper is not of the best when he awakens, I warn thee!"

"But Hubert!" Gerte suddenly exclaimed. "What hast thou done with Hubert?"

"Alas! Thou hast both parted company with thy wits!" Sire Claire exclaimed. "My patience is gone. Back to thy apartment, Lady Jonquile, before I send the guard to take thee to Baron Wilfred."

"But, listen, Sire Claire," Jonquile began and plunged into a recital of their quest.

Sire Claire folded his arms and waited. "I know naught of thy yokel," he said scornfully. "He hath not been here!"

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"Not been here!" Gerte wailed. "Where is he?"

"But we found his token!" exclaimed Jonquile.

"What care I for the yokel or his token!" Sorely tried by the girl's persistence, Sire Claire forgot all his training in courtesy and chivalry. "Lady Jonquile, I shall ——"

But what Sire Claire intended to do was ever a mystery, for a soft hand touched his arm, and a soft voice bade him be quiet.

"'Tis the daughter of the baron who speaks to thee, my nephew!" the duchess said as she stepped in front of him, and trailed her floating draperies into the corridor.

Jonquile made a deep curtsy, but Gerte, the beggar maid, paid no attention to the rank of the great lady. She thought only of the boy who had befriended her.

"Hubert is lost, oh gracious lady!" she cried.

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"Hubert?" the duchess said vaguely, for she was not thinking of the peasant lad.

"Mele awakened and besought us to bring the duke." Gerte continued. "Hubert came to find him—and he never returned!"

"And the witch woman hath spoken!" The duchess exclaimed. "Quickly, girl, tell me what she said!"

"She spoke most wildly, gracious lady. I fear her wits are gone entirely, for she chatters of Hubert and calls him the son of the duke!"

The duchess clutched Sire Claire's arm. "The duke! Bid him follow me, for I go to the witch woman!" she cried.

Gathering her draperies around her, she sped down the corridor with the two girls following close behind. When they reached the chamber where Mele lay, they found the Rat cowering in the corner.

"I am frightened at Mele," he whimpered.

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"She is a witch bewitched. She raves and calls first for Hubert and then for the duke, and she threatened to beat me unless I brought them to her."

The duchess paid not the least attention to the boy. She walked straight to Mele's pallet and placed her hand on the old woman's forehead.

"Witch woman!" she said, "Speak to me of my son."

Mele opened her eyes. "The duke!" she muttered. "Send for the duke." Her eyelids fluttered and closed, but though the duchess pled with her, she would say nothing further.

Nor could Lady Jonquile or Gerte persuade the witch to speak. She lay as still as though carved from stone, though once or twice she muttered words which none could understand.

There was a sound of running footsteps

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ringing along the corridor and Brinda, the tiring maid, burst pell-mell into the room.

"Lady Jonquile! Lady Jonquile!" she cried. "Thou hast frightened me nearly to death. Had it not been for Jacques, the guard, I should have raised the castle when I found thee gone! Come with me. Come back at once to thy room before thy lady mother learns of thy disobedience."

"Nay, good Brinda," Jonquile answered, "I do not wish to go with thee for I must hear what Mele will say and find out what hath become of Hubert and ——"

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Brinda. She was quite out of temper from her fright in finding that Lady Jonquile was not in her bed. "Come at once."

Tears rose in Jonquile's blue eyes and rolled down her rounded cheeks. "I do not wish to be scolded," she sobbed. "I but sought the yokel who found my dear falcon."

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"And none shall scold thee more, my pretty Lady Jonquile," the duke's deep voice rang through the chamber and he held out his hand to the weeping girl. "Come hither and tell me of thy troubles."

So Jonquile told of Mele's awakening, of Hubert's disappearance, and of her visit to the duke's apartments.

"And the witch woman babbles crazily of thee, and of Hubert and thy son," she ended.

"Nor will she speak to me, my husband." The duchess said turning away from Mele. "Go to her, I pray thee, and ask what she means!"

The duke had little patience with Mele's stories and he was sorely tempted to go away and leave them all. But a glance at his wife's white face caused him to stride toward the witch's bed and to grasp her roughly by the shoulder.

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"Speak, woman," he commanded. "Enough of this nonsense. Speak, I say."

Slowly Mele opened her eyes and looked up into the dark face bending over her. "Thou hast come, great lord," she quavered. "I have news of thy son."

So, with the little group of listeners gathered about her, the old woman related a strange tale. She muttered of the great anger of Sned against the duke because he had thrown him into the baron's dungeon. She raised herself on her elbow and whispered of the trader's chance to steal the tiny babe when a careless nurse left him while the ducal family was on its way to Paris. She trembled and sank back again on the bundle of straw as she explained how the child was passed on to her in exchange for the golden chain which she never dared to sell, and concluded her story by saying that Sned had finally carried him to the home of Jean, though the farmer had

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no idea of the little boy's identity. Sned's gifts and fear of his anger had quieted the peasants and to the neighbors the boy was but one of Jean's many children.

The tale of the witch was so sincere that all who heard it believed, and later all she said was proven.

Except for the sobbing of the duchess there was no sound in the little room. Then, suddenly, Gerte began to jump up and down and clapped her hands.

"He is the duke's son! Mele meant what she said! Hubert is the duke's son!" she cried wildly. She caught hold of the Rat's hands and began to dance around and around. "Think of it, Rat, Hubert is the son of the great Duke of Vertebois!"

"Stop thy nonsense, Gerte," the Rat protested. "Hubert is my brother and always will be!"

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"What meanest thou?" the duke demanded. "Hubert? Thy brother? Who is Hubert?"

Then it was that the Lady Jonquile forgot all the lessons in politeness given her by her mother. She clutched at the bottom of the duke's tunic and shook it vigorously.

"Hast thou too lost thy wits, great lord?" she demanded. "We have told thee over and over again about Hubert, the yokel, who found my falcon. He is thy son, else Mele tells that which be not true!"

"Bring him to me! Bring him to me at once," the duchess cried.

"Nay, Lady, we cannot," Gerte said softly, "He is lost!"

And once again she explained how Hubert had started to bring the duke and how he had not returned to Mele's chamber. Then Jonquile held out the glove she had found at the curve in the corridor.

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"'Tis my token," she explained. "I found it in the corridor."

Then it was that the great Duke of Vertebois began the search for Hubert, known as the son of Jean, the farmer. But though men-at-arms and servants scoured the castle from top to bottom he could not be found. Nor was there any trace of him when the baron and his guests set out for the tourney which must be held today since knights and ladies from far and near had come to attend it.

And, because the duke and Sire Victor wished it, the heart-broken duchess dried her tears and went with all the castle-folk to the lists where lodges, shaded by canopies, and gay with banners were built for the noble guests. At her request Gerte and the Rat were allowed a great privilege and sat at the feet of the Lady Jonquile in the great pavilion.

CHAPTER XIII

At the Tourney

HUBERT scampered behind the cattle-shed. He hoped no one had seen him as he ran from Jean's hut to the building where his oxen and prized cows were quartered.

Jean and his daughters had found it impossible to resist the attractions of the tourney, for they had looked forward to it for weeks. Even Jean's fear of Sned could not keep him home on this gala day. So he had gone back to the castle, leaving his charge in the care of his wife. But the good dame, too, longed for

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gaiety, so, as soon as her husband was out of sight, she had followed him across the grain-fields.

To be sure she had barricaded the small window and barred the door before she went. She intended to keep quite out of sight of Jean and to return before he came home. But she felt that it was absolute nonsense to remain in the hut on this beautiful day when crowds would come for miles around to see the jousting.

"And take good care, my lad, that thou dost not try to run away, else Jean will beat thee. As to what Sned would do—ah, I cannot picture it!" were her words of final warning to Hubert.

He waited for an hour or more after she went before he made any attempt to escape from his prison. He would not, he could not go away with Sned. Somehow he must leave

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this hut which he had called home for so many years.

First, he pushed against the door. But the bar was strong and Jean's wife had set against it a stout oaken stick and had wedged it deep into the earth. He succeeded in opening the door a crack, but he could move it no farther. The window was quite out of the question. His shoulders would not go through the small opening nor could he turn in any way that would allow him to climb out, even if he could pry out the shutter. A small piece of blue sky showing through the thick thatch gave him an idea. There was no chimney in the hut and the smoke from the fireplace escaped through a hole left in the roof.

In the center of the blackened room stood a great oak table. Hubert scrambled up on it. He could just touch the roof with his upstretched hand and that was all. He looked about the room. Ah, yes, there was the stool

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upon which Jean was accustomed to sit. Jumping down, Hubert placed the stool on the table and taking the large fire-tongs from beside the fireplace, clambered back up again. It was but the work of a moment to mount the stool. Reaching with the tongs, he made the hole in the roof much larger. It was easy now for him to scramble through and the tongs fell with a clatter to the floor of hard earth.

He crept on his hands and knees across the thatch, frightening out the mice who lived in it. Then, swinging by his hands, he let himself down to the ground. An easy task, indeed, and one which Jean and his wife would not have been capable of picturing.

The two oxen were switching their tails, in a vain attempt to drive away the myriads of flies settling upon them. Hubert patted their noses. He was fond of the oxen for they had done many a hard day's work together.

"Farewell," he said. "I leave thee, good

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oxen. I am never coming back, for I go to the great duke to crave protection from Sned."

He waved his hands to his gentle-eyed friends and ran toward the river. He clambered down over the bank and began to wade upstream in the shallows. He knew in this way he would reach the castle and he meant to keep hidden by the rushes and grasses until he reached the spot where he could safely leave their shelter.

On and on he went until, suddenly, he began to hear the great hum of many voices and he knew that somewhere in the vicinity a great crowd had assembled. He climbed up the bank and crouching on his hands and knees began to crawl through the grass.

As he came out farther into the open space he could see that the two pairs of wooden palisades on the exercise ground sheltered a throng of horses and their attendants, laughing squires and heralds decked in gay colors.

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Behind the outer palisade swarmed every man, woman and child in the barony.

Hubert's eyes sparkled. In spite of Jean and Sned, he was about to see his first tourney. How festive were the pavilions and lodges where sat the gentry! White mules, bedecked with ribbons wound upon them by the hands of the ladies who had ridden them, grazed peacefully outside the palisades.

Hubert stared at the sea of faces in the pavilions. In the center one, he distinguished the great duke and his lady. That spot of gold beside them must be Sire Victor. He shaded his eyes with his hand. Yes, he could not be mistaken, the Lady Jonquile was seated beside her young guest.

Hubert crouched down again and began to crawl through the grass. He must get nearer that gay scene. On and on he went until he came to the end of the first pavilion. This was the very spot for him to view the tourney for

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he would never dare go near the palisades since Jean and Sned might be there.

The great procession preceding the tourney was now beginning. It was wonderful enough to make any boy's heart happy. A loud blast sounded from the trumpets of the heralds and then, Baron Wifred, arrayed in his finest clothing, and followed by six knights came into the lists. They walked on until they came to the pavilion where sat the duke. Here they paused and the baron bent his knee to his liege lord and raised a small white cane.

"Bring in the jousters," he loudly called.

In his excitement at the splendor of the scene that followed, Hubert forgot to keep hidden by the pavilion.

Again the trumpets sounded and four heralds led in the procession. After them, on a prancing horse, rode Jacques, the jongleur, and as the graceful animal proceeded, the minstrel stood on its back and threw into the

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air again and again his flower-decked lute. Following him came sixty knights, riding their great war-horses and singing a mighty battle-song. Gay streamers floated from their lances, while ribbons and gloves, thrown by the ladies in the pavilions, fell at the horses' feet or caught on the lances held out to catch them.

Hubert forgot everything but the scene before him. Sned! Jean! He did not even think of them. He called loudly with the rest of the throng as a herald sang a challenge for a volunteer jousting.

Now two knights were riding into the lists. They faced each other and saluted. Then their squires led their horses to different ends of the lists and turned them about.

"Do battle, brave knights!" the herald called.

And now such a din and hub-bub arose as Hubert had never before seen. Ladies and

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nobles arose in the pavilions and lodges and waved their banners. The peasants behind the palisade broke into cries and shouts.

Low in their saddles bent the knights. Each swinging his shield and lowering his helmet to the top of it and, putting his horse to a gallop, flew to meet his opponent.

Which would have his lance point broken? The clods of earth were thrown in all directions as the horses plunged this way and that. One of them hit Hubert in the face. He jumped back straight into the arms of a man who stood behind him.

"So, thou art come to the tourney!" a voice which he recognized cried.

"Sned!" Hubert came back to earth with a bang, and all the glamour and beauty of the day faded.

Sned had found him before he had reached the duke. Now all his hopes of aid were gone.

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"Thou thought not to find me here, eh?" the man asked. "But let me tell thee, lad, the pavilions offer most excellent pickings, as I shall teach thee."

Hubert looked about him. There was no way of escape. Should he run toward the river, Sned could easily overtake him. In front of him was the lists with the jousting knights cantering back to their stations to make ready for another trial of skill.

One knight took a new shield from his squire and again the two contestants rushed toward each other. Hubert looked down toward the middle pavilion. The duke was leaning from his balcony. Somehow he must reach him. So, without stopping to think of what he was doing, he dashed into the lists. A loud cry of protest rose from a thousand lips. Hubert heeded it not. Behind him came Sned. His hand grasped the boy's shoulder, but with a last mad spurt for liberty, Hubert sped like an

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arrow pulled from the bow. He kept his eyes on the duke's face and never knew that many people were sorely angry because a peasant might stop their fun.

"Catch him! Stop him!" someone yelled.

This was a new signal for Sned who had not quite dared to run out into the lists. He began to run after the boy. At the same time, a peasant leaped over the palisade. It was Jean who had just discovered that his prisoner had escaped.

But the two knights were too intent on their fray to notice anything amiss. They raised their lances. The knight with the blue token fastened to his lance broke his opponent's shield, but the other knight entirely missed his aim and his lance flew into the air. Before he could grasp it, the missile struck Hubert on the shoulder.

A sharp stinging pain tore down his arm. He staggered and Sned snatched at him. But



THE DEATH OF KING RICHARD III.

AT THE TOURNEY

in spite of the pain and the feeling of faintness enveloping him, the boy sped on, only to have Jean head him off.

"'Tis Hubert! 'Tis Hubert!" a squeaking voice shrieked.

There, standing on the railing of the balcony where sat the duke, was the Rat, his tattered clothes fluttering in the wind. Gerte hung to his shoulder and far over the side of the pavilion leaned the Lady Jonquile.

The sight of his friends gave Hubert new courage. He made a final spurt and climbed up into the balcony. As he sank down upon the floor, a great darkness swept over him.

When he regained consciousness, his head was pillowed in the duchess' lap and her face was indeed sweet to see. Beside him stood the castle leech who had been brought down to attend knights wounded in the tourney.

"Thou art as good as new, my lad," he said kindly. "The lance grazed thy shoulder, but I

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have tied it up as well as wert thou the son of our great Duke of Vertebois, himself."

"And mayhap he is, good leech," the soft voice of the duchess replied. "Look, my husband, the boy comes from his faint!" she added.

Gently the great lady raised the boy and held him in her arms, and, after one look up into her shining face, he threw his arms around her neck. Then from her neck she took the golden chain that Mele had hidden for so many years and threw it over the head of her new found son.

As for the duke, he summoned a herald and bade him announce that the son of the Duke and Duchess of Vertebois was returned to them by the grace of God. Then he held out his hands and drew Hubert to him. For many minutes there was silence as he gazed long into the face of the dark-eyed, smiling boy.

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"But thy brother!" the duchess cried. "Thou hast not yet spoken with him!"

She led Hubert to the boy clad in golden silk. Hubert knelt down and kissed Sire Victor's white hand. The frail boy bade him rise.

"Thou art my brother and I love thee," he said.

Suddenly Hubert remembered the Rat and Gerte. They were standing behind him, not knowing what to do nor where to go.

"Rat!" he called clearly, "when the tourney is over I shall take thee home.

Then, indeed, did the duke laugh at the thought that his son should return across the fields to the peasant's hut. The Rat should stay with Hubert, he said, to be his friend and body-servant. As for Gerte—as for Gerte—the liege lord knit his brow in a puzzled frown.

"And may it please thee, great duke," the Lady Jonquile said, "my mother says that Gerte may be my very own tiring-woman."

HUBERT THE HAPPY

And what became of Sned? He was never found though the baron's soldiers hunted for him for days.

At the close of the tourney, began the great feasting which for days pleased rich and poor alike. It was fitting that the return of the young Count Hubert, who was known during his long life as "The Happy One" should be celebrated in great splendor.



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